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ABSTRACT

This report provides a review of literature published in the past 2 decades on the role and effectiveness of school boards. Though school boards are but one component of school district leadership--the superintendent and other district administrators and staff constituting the other main components--school boards are the focus of this review because they have a distinct role and have been understudied. The report is organized into five major sections. It begins by presenting a brief history of school boards, then it describes their current state. The charge that school boards are outmoded and should be eliminated cannot be addressed adequately without an understanding of how they have evolved and currently function. In the third section, school boards and educational governance reforms are examined in order to describe the larger context in which school boards operate and explore how school boards have been, and might be, reformed in the future. In the next section, characteristics of effective school boards that have been identified by school board experts are described. Because qualitative and quantitative research on school boards is limited, the final section discusses research limitations and future directions. (Contains 116 references.) (SM)

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LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS UNDER REVIEW

Their Role and Effectiveness in Relation to Students' Academic Achievement

Deborah Land

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CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS PLACED AT RISK

LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS UNDER REVIEW
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Johns Hopkins University

Report No. 56

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Every child has the capacity to succeed in school and in life. Yet far too many children fail to meet their potential. Many students, especially those from poor and minority families, are placed at risk by school practices that sort some students into high-quality programs and other students into low-quality education. CRESPAR believes that schools must replace the "sorting paradigm" with a "talent development" model that sets high expectations for all students, and ensures that all students receive a rich and demanding curriculum with appropriate assistance and support.

The mission of the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk (CRESPAR) is to conduct the research, development, evaluation, and dissemination needed to transform schooling for students placed at risk. The work of the Center is guided by three central themes—ensuring the success of all students at key development points, building on students' personal and cultural assets, and scaling up effective programs—and conducted through research and development programs in the areas of early and elementary studies; middle and high school studies; school, family, and community partnerships; and systemic supports for school reform, as well as a program of institutional activities.

CRESPAR is organized as a partnership of Johns Hopkins University and Howard University, and supported by the National Institute on the Education of At-Risk Students (At-Risk Institute), one of five institutes created by the Educational Research, Development, Dissemination and Improvement Act of 1994 and located within the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) at the U.S. Department of Education. The At-Risk Institute supports a range of research and development activities designed to improve the education of students at risk of educational failure because of limited English proficiency, poverty, race, geographic location, or economic disadvantage.

ABSTRACT

This report provides a review of literature published in the past two decades on the role and effectiveness of school boards. Though school boards are but one component of school district leadership—the superintendent and other district administrators and staff constituting the other main components—school boards are the focus of this review because they have a distinct role and have been understudied.

The report is organized into five major sections. First, a brief history of school boards is presented, and then their current state is described. The charge that school boards are outmoded and should be eliminated cannot be addressed adequately without an understanding of how they have evolved and currently function. Next, school boards and educational governance reforms are examined in order to describe the larger context in which school boards operate and to explore how school boards have been, and might be, reformed in the future. In a separate section, characteristics of effective school boards that have been identified by school board experts are described. Because qualitative and quantitative research on school boards is limited, the final section is devoted to discussion of research limitations and future directions.

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INTRODUCTION

According to The Twentieth Century Fund (1992), local public school boards have been "the distinctive hallmark of American education for more than one hundred and fifty years" (p. 17). In recent decades, however, school boards have been the target of criticism by those who perceive them as outdated and incapable of effectively leading educational reforms to improve students' academic achievement, particularly in urban areas (Carol, Cunningham, Danzberger, Kirst, McCloud, & Usdan, 1986; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Danzberger, 1992, 1994; Danzberger, Carol, Cunningham, Kirst, McCloud, & Usdan, 1987; Danzberger, Kirst, & Usdan, M.D., 1992; Danzberger & Usdan, 1994; Finn, 1991; Harrington-Lueker, 1996; Kirst, 1994; NSBF, 1999; Olson, 1992; Streshly & Frase, 1993; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992; Todras, 1993; Whitson, 1998; Wilson, 1994). Despite the long-standing presence of local school boards in American public education, few data-driven studies of their effectiveness exist to shed light on what role they should have in the 21st century. Nonetheless, review of opinion-based academic and professional writings on the role and effectiveness of local school boards, combined with an examination of the limited number of data-driven studies, can illuminate the role that school boards might play in the future and reveal the traits that may make them effective, particularly in raising student achievement.

This report provides a review of literature published in the past two decades on the role and effectiveness of school boards.[1] Though school boards are but one component of school district leadership—the superintendent and other district administrators and staff constituting the other main components—school boards are the focus of this review because they have a distinct role and have been understudied.[2] Initially, an ERIC database search was conducted using the term "Boards of Education" as a keyword. Effort was made to find qualitative and quantitative studies that included student achievement as an outcome variable, due to the currently widespread focus on improving student achievement. Evidence of this is found in the accountability movement's push for state and federal achievement standards and testing, The National School Boards Foundation's (NSBF, 1999) proclamation that school boards' primary fundamental goal must be to improve students' academic achievement, and The National School Boards Association's (NSBA) adoption of the improvement of student achievement as a major objective for school boards (Speer, 1998). Though school boards may be judged effective by measures other than student achievement, such as their ability to balance budgets, comply with legislation, and respond to local concerns, student achievement is the predominant measure of interest here.

The initial ERIC search produced few studies of school board effectiveness that contained student achievement as an outcome variable, and, thus, a wider net was cast to capture other studies of school boards; writings on the broader issue of educational governance reforms; papers on the current and future role of school boards; professional guidebooks for school boards, such as those published by the NSBA; and other opinion-based documents identifying characteristics of effective school boards. The purpose of the review shifted from

a definitive examination of data-based studies of school board effectiveness in improving student achievement to an examination of the past, present, and future role of school boards and exploration of what characteristics might make them effective, based on an extensive, though not exhaustive, examination of the broad school board literature.

The report is organized into five major sections. First, a brief history of school boards is presented, and then their current state is described. The charge that school boards are outmoded and should be eliminated cannot be addressed adequately without an understanding of how they have evolved and currently function. Next, school boards and educational governance reforms are examined in order to describe the larger context in which school boards operate and to explore how school boards have been, and might be, reformed in the future. In a separate section, characteristics of effective school boards that have been identified by school board experts[3] are described. Because qualitative and quantitative research on school boards is limited, the final section is devoted to discussion of research limitations and future directions.

History of School Boards

Local school boards, comprised of lay individuals and vested with authority by their state, traditionally have governed public education in the United States (Johnson, 1988). The roots of this system of school governance reach back more than 200 years to Massachusetts' representative system of local governance by selectmen (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992, 1994). As local governance responsibilities increased consonant with population growth, selectmen separated educational governance from general local governance and appointed a committee in each town to govern education (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992, 1994). In 1837, Massachusetts established the first state board of education to give states a greater role in education, but local school boards retained most of the control over their schools, due at least in part to public distrust of the ability of distant political bodies to satisfy local needs and preferences (Danzberger, 1992, 1994). Separate districts of schools, funded by local taxes, were formed as more schools were built to accommodate continuing population growth (Danzberger, 1992). Massachusetts enacted legislation in 1891 that vested each district with financial and administrative authority over its schools (Danzberger, 1992). The Massachusetts system of separate educational governance spread throughout the colonies and was a prototype for today's governance of public schools by local school boards (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992). From the mid 1800s through the early 1900s, the number of local school boards burgeoned, and while there was variation in governance structures, local school boards primarily oversaw and managed public education (Carol et al., 1986; Johnson, 1988).

In the late 1800s, school board members in urban areas typically were elected by local wards (or neighborhoods), which enmeshed the school board members in local ward politics (Danzberger, 1992; Urban & Wagoner, 1996). In response to perceptions that this linkage

subjected schools to corruption, as well as the belief that schools were not adequately educating an increasingly diverse student population, elite professional, business, and education reformers strove to reform local educational governance (Danzberger, 1992, 1994; Kirst, 1994; Rothman, 1992; Urban & Wagoner, 1996; Usdan, 1994). During the first two decades of the 20th century, local educational governance became centralized within a smaller city school board comprised of lay citizens selected through city-wide elections instead of in multiple, larger, ward school boards (Danzberger, 1992; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1994; Kirst, 1994; Rothman, 1992; Urban & Wagoner, 1996). The centralized city school board was modeled on corporate boards and designed to be more focused on policy and less involved in daily administration (Danzberger, 1992; Danzberger & Usdan; 1994; Urban & Wagoner, 1996). The role of superintendent, which in the mid to late 1800s had been largely instructional and tightly circumscribed by the school board, expanded to encompass many more management responsibilities and became professionalized, requiring formal training (Danzberger, 1992; Urban & Wagoner, 1996). Researchers have described the shift to a smaller, centralized, policy-making lay school board with a professional superintendent as its chief executive officer and selection of board members through city-wide (or district-wide as the reform spread from the cities to rural areas) elections as the last major reform of school boards (Danzberger, 1994; Danzberger & Usdan, 1994; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1994; Kirst, 1994).

As of this last major reform, local school boards in the United States have typically evinced the following characteristics: local control in order to meet the specific needs and preferences of the population; separation of educational from general governance; large districts with small boards; lay oversight with concentration on policy making and reliance on a professional superintendent for management, patterned after corporate boards of directors with a chief executive officer; and democratic representation of all citizens through at-large elections rather than subdistrict elections or appointments. School boards have not uniformly or uncontroversially manifested these "traditional" characteristics, however (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992; Urban & Wagoner, 1996). In Virginia, for example, the appointment of school board members was mandatory until the General Assembly passed legislation in 1992 permitting elections. In Hawaii, the State Board of Education sets and oversees policy for public education; there are no local school boards. Furthermore, by design, school boards historically have had flexibility in governance and have varied in their management, operation, and priorities in response to their local economic, political, social, and religious contexts (Danzberger et al., 1987; Johnson, 1988; Olson & Bradley, 1992; Resnick, 1999). Specific factors, such as the resources available and the size and special needs of the student population, account for some of the variation among school boards; an urban school board serving a largely minority, low-income population of 100,000 students likely would operate differently and have different priorities than a suburban school board serving a primarily White, middle-class population of 2,500 pupils (Resnick, 1999).

The greatest deviation from traditional characteristics in the second half of the 20th century has been in the reduction of local control by school boards, as federal and state governments have assumed a greater role in the governance of education (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992; Danzberger et al., 1987, 1992; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Hadderman, 1988; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1994; Johnson, 1988; Kirst, 1994; Olson & Bradley, 1992; Reid, 2000; Resnick, 1999; Todras, 1993). The 1954 Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Supreme Court decision necessitated the federal government's involvement in local education to oversee desegregation (Johnson, 1988; Rothman, 1992). In the 1950s and 1960s, the federal government assumed greater control through special programs and the provision of federal funds in an effort to improve education and quell concern, generated by the Soviet Union's launch of the Sputnik satellite, regarding the inadequacy of American students' academic achievement (Danzberger, 1992; ECS, 1999; Rothman, 1992). In the 1960s and 1970s, federally- and state-funded categorical programs, such as special and migrant education, proliferated (ECS, 1999; Kirst, 1994). The publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in Education warned that growing mediocrity in public education threatened to compromise the United States' economic leadership in the world. This report spawned the excellence movement of the 1980s and prompted states to become more involved in local educational governance (ECS, 1999; Hadderman, 1988). States sought to improve students' academic achievement by legislating prescriptions for curricula, teacher certification, competency testing, graduation standards, and data collection (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger et al., 1987, 1992; Johnson, 1988; Kirst, 1994; Nowakowski & First, 1989; Olson & Bradley, 1992; Resnick, 1999; Rothman, 1992). Federal and state governments continue to push for high academic standards and accountability, pressure that shows no signs of abating.

CURRENT STATE OF SCHOOL BOARDS

Approximately 95,000 school board members serve on 15,000 local public school boards in the United States (Resnick, 1999). Thus, most school boards have five to seven members, with urban boards more likely to have seven or more members (Robinson & Bickers, 1990). The majority of school board members live in small towns or suburbs, followed by rural, then urban, areas (ASBJ, 1997, 1998). Although 80% of school districts enroll fewer than 3,000 students, most studies of school boards focus on larger, urban districts, which educate a disproportionate number of children (Danzberger, 1992; Kirst, 1994; Wilson, 1994). Nearly one-sixth of public school students live in the 50 largest school districts, which together comprise less than 1% of all districts (Wilson, 1994). In 1990-91, only 4% of school districts enrolled more than 10,000 students, but these served nearly half of all public students (Olson & Bradley, 1992). From 1988-89 to 1997-98, the number of larger districts gradually rose, while the number of smaller districts declined, continuing the trend toward larger districts begun in the early 20th century (NCES, 2000).

The reform movement of the early 20th century, which transformed school boards to smaller, centralized, city-wide organizations, also brought more educated, higher income, successful professionals and businessmen onto school boards, a change that generated concern regarding the ability of such elite members to effectively represent the concerns of local citizens (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1994; Urban & Wagoner, 1996). According to surveys conducted by *The American School Board Journal* and Virginia Tech University, board members still tend to be financially successful and highly educated (ASJB, 1997, 1998). Approximately 67% of school board members in 1997-98 reported an income of at least $60,000, with 28% claiming an income greater than $100,000. Most members (44%) occupied managerial or professional positions, and 13% owned their own businesses. Nearly half the members (46%) had earned graduate degrees, and more than another quarter (29%) held a four-year college degree. In 1997-98, more than 80% of school board members stated that they were White. Only 6.5% of members reported that they were Black, and 3.1% reported that they were Hispanic. Racial/ethnic minority groups tend to be underrepresented on school boards, which has prompted alteration of at-large election procedures and decentralization of local control in some areas (Boone, 1996; Bradley, 1992; Cuban, 1990). Approximately 39-44% of school board member survey respondents were female (some members did not report their gender). Many members (43%) reported that they did not have a child attending public school. Thus, school board members continue to differ demographically from many of the people they serve.

Although in the 1970s urban school districts began moving toward subdistrict, away from city-wide, elections in an effort to have school board members more closely reflect and represent the racial/ethnic groups within their cities, most elections across the nation still occur at large (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1994; Danzberger et al., 1987; Kirst, 1994). The vast majority of school board members, approximately 95-96%, are elected by local citizens for 3- to 4-year terms (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992; Resnick, 1999; Robinson & Bickers, 1990). Although high turnover rates plague some boards (Carol et al., 1986; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000), ASJB survey respondents reported having served as follows: 37% three or fewer years, 28% four to six years, and 33% seven or more years. It has been reported that board members devote an average of about 20 hours per month to school board work, but this figure is thought to underestimate the true number of hours served (Illinois Association of School Boards, 1996).

Since the 1980s, what is regarded as the traditional role of school boards has been increasingly questioned and challenged, particularly in urban areas (Carol et al., 1986; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Danzberger, 1992, 1994; Danzberger et al., 1987, 1992; Danzberger & Usdan, 1994; Finn, 1991; Harrington-Lueker, 1996; Kirst, 1994; NSBF, 1999; Olson, 1992; Olson & Bradley, 1992; Streshly & Frase, 1993; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992; Todras, 1993; Whitson, 1998; Wilson, 1994). Somewhat ironically, state and federal incursion into local school boards' traditional roles might have significantly limited the ability of boards to improve education, though some school board critics claim that increased state and federal involvement has been necessary because of boards' ineffectiveness (Carol et al., 1986;

Danzberger, 1994; Danzberger et al., 1987; Kirst, 1994). In recent decades, many states, municipalities, and school systems have experimented with alternative forms of educational governance in which the school board has had a further reduced, often unclear, role (Danzberger et al., 1992; ECS, 1999; Lindle, 1995/1996; Olson, 1992; Resnick, 1999; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992; Ziebarth, 1999).

Survey and case study data reveal that school boards today face traditional challenges, such as securing and allocating adequate finances and recruiting and maintaining talented staff. They also face new issues, such as state- and federal-level interference, greater public apathy toward, and lack of confidence in, public schools and school boards, a more diverse student population, and more controversial and pervasive social problems, making governance more difficult and complex (Carol et al., 1986; Olson & Bradley, 1992). Yet, school boards continue to be valued and supported, as evidenced by the following comments by researchers and authorities:

> School boards "provide the crucial link between public values and professional expertise" (Resnick, 1999, p. 6); they are "the epitome of representative governance in our democracy" (Shannon, 1994, p. 387); and, "School board membership is the highest form of public service" (Carol et al., 1986, p. 14).

An extensive national study of school boards found that local citizens, parents, community leaders, and educators support the local school board as an institution close to the citizens it represents (Carol et al., 1986). Thus, while local school boards have generated much criticism, they still engender public support. The challenge for school boards and those proposing school board and educational governance reforms is to figure out which form(s) of governance and management, operational procedures, and priorities best match local characteristics and translate into improved educational outcomes, particularly greater academic achievement. In the next section, the pressures and criticisms aimed at school boards are discussed in more detail, and school board and educational governance reforms are examined.

CURRENT AND FUTURE REFORMS

According to The Twentieth Century Fund (1992), local school boards are experiencing a crisis of relevance and legitimacy. Many critics perceive boards, as currently structured and operating, to be incapable of producing sufficient academic achievement to ensure the United States' continued economic preeminence (Carol et al., 1986; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Danzberger, 1992, 1994; Danzberger et al., 1987, 1992; Danzberger & Usdan, 1994; Harrington-Lueker, 1996; Kirst, 1994; NSBF, 1999; Olson & Bradley, 1992; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992; Todras, 1993; Wilson, 1994). Indeed, some critics have proposed the elimination of school boards (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Finn, 1991; Harrington-Lueker, 1996; Olson, 1992; Streshly & Frase, 1993; Whitson, 1998). In this section, the pressures and

criticisms supporting calls for reform or elimination of school boards are reviewed; reforms for school boards are presented; and, reforms for educational governance, including the school board's role and responsibilities in these reforms, are discussed.

Pressures and Criticisms

Technological advances have transformed the workplace and increased the demand for a highly skilled, intellectually advanced workforce (Danzberger, 1992; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Wilson, 1994). Business leaders claim that insufficient numbers of potential employees are qualified for entry-level positions (Danzberger, 1992; Wilson, 1994). Concurrently, demographic factors, such as poverty and an increasingly diverse student population, and social problems, such as drug use, violence, and homelessness, have challenged the ability of public schools to improve students' academic achievement, particularly in urban areas (Danzberger, 1992; Danzberger et al., 1992; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Olson & Bradley, 1992; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992). The Brown v. Board of Education decision, the civil rights movement, and white flight from public schools, especially in urban areas, have drawn attention to the failure of public education to equably educate racial/ethnic minority students (Danzberger, 1992). Business leaders, government officials, and education experts frequently insist that educational reforms are necessary to meet the needs of today's public school students, particularly racial/ethnic minority students in urban areas, and to guarantee the United States' future economic viability (Carol et al., 1986; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Danzberger, 1992, 1994; Danzberger et al., 1987, 1992; Danzberger & Usdan, 1994; Kirst, 1994; NSBF, 1999; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992; Todras, 1993; Wilson, 1994).

School boards are often perceived as obstacles to, rather than facilitators of, educational reforms (Danzberger et al., 1987; Danzberger, 1992, 1994; Harp, 1992; Harrington-Lueker, 1996; Johnson, 1988; Kirst, 1994; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992). In the 1980s, the excellence movement coalesced around the goal of improving students' academic achievement in order to reverse the "rising tide of mediocrity" forecasted by the federally-commissioned report, *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The excellence movement reforms manifested themselves primarily in state legislation prescribing tougher academic requirements for students and teachers and failed to produce the anticipated gains in students' academic achievement (Danzberger, 1992; Danzberger et al., 1992). Major reform reports produced in the 1980s show that school boards were expected to have little role in the reform efforts (Danzberger et al., 1987; Johnson, 1988). Nevertheless, research indicates that school boards did not resist the excellence reforms (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992; Firestone, Furhman, & Kirst, 1989; Nowakowski & First, 1989). School boards implemented reforms, sometimes prior to the legislation, and some boards used the reforms to promote local goals; insufficient funding and the complexity of state mandates and other barriers, however, constrained the degree of implementation (Carol

et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992; Firestone, Furhman, & Kirst, 1989; Nowakowski & First, 1989). The restructuring/systemic reform movement emerged after the excellence reforms failed to achieve their expected outcomes (Danzberger, 1992; Danzberger et al., 1992). The restructuring/systemic reform movement has sought to increase accountability for students' academic achievement, expand access to quality education, increase linkages to social service agencies, and restructure educational governance (Danzberger, 1992; Danzberger et al., 1992). This movement has also not incorporated school boards as potential facilitators of reform, but has pressured them to react to new initiatives (Danzberger, 1992; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; NSBF, 1999; Reid, 2000).

As previously mentioned, states have greatly increased their involvement in local public education, passing increasingly prescriptive legislation within the last two decades (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992; Danzberger et al., 1987, 1992; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Hadderman, 1988; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1994; Johnson, 1988; Kirst, 1994; Olson & Bradley, 1992; Reid, 2000; Resnick, 1999; Todras, 1993). States have extended their purview to specification of requirements and standards for education generally (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger et al., 1987, 1992; Johnson, 1988; Kirst, 1994; Nowakowski & First, 1989; Olson & Bradley, 1992; Resnick, 1999; Rothman, 1992). In the 1980s, 44 states passed large-scale education reform packages and increased funding for education (Danzberger et al., 1992). The states' growing involvement in local educational governance has confused school board members and the p[illegible]lic regarding who is in control of education and what the school board's role is (Carol et al., 1986; Kirst, 1994). Greater centralization of control over local education at the state level has led to calls for initiatives for deregulation, but such initiatives frequently have transferred decision-making authority to the school level, bypassing school boards, as has occurred in Kentucky (Danzberger, 1992; Danzberger et al., 1987, 1992; ECS, 1999; Harp, 1992; Lindle, 1995/1996; Ziebarth, 1999). Though school boards are uniquely positioned to coordinate reform efforts in accordance with local needs, they have generally acquiesced to state control and have not become full partners in the adoption and implementation of educational governance reforms (Danzberger et al., 1987, 1992).

In addition to the states, other groups have increased their control over local educational governance. Federally-funded categorical programs and federal regulations have proliferated (ECS, 1999; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Kirst, 1994). Teachers unions and organizations have assumed greater control (Johnson, 1988). The courts have begun to issue judgments on educational matters over which school boards and state legislatures traditionally have ruled, such as the use of standardized testing (Carol et al., 1986; Johnson, 1988; Sewall, 1996). Special interest groups have become more influential (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger et al., 1992; Nowakowski & First, 1989). According to Kirst (1994), school boards will continue to lose ground unless they reevaluate their role within the current educational context and refashion themselves accordingly.

School boards themselves have engendered criticism for a variety of reasons, in addition to their failure to assume a leading role in educational reform. One prominent

criticism is that the public is largely uninvolved in school boards. Only a small percentage of the electorate, 10-15% on average across the nation, votes in school board elections, and candidates are in short supply in some areas (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger et al., 1987; Danzberger, 1992; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Hickle, 1998; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1994; Rallis & Criscoe, 1993; Resnick, 1999; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992; Wagner, 1992). Another related criticism is that school boards do not represent the local public's interests and values (Rallis & Criscoe, 1993). A national public opinion survey reveals that urban school board members and members of the urban public differ in their assessments of the performance of their schools, perceptions of the relative potential of several specific improvement strategies, and identification of top concerns (NSBF, 1999). School boards frequently draw criticism for micromanagement and encroachment upon the administration's role (Carol et al., 1986; Carver, 1997; Danzberger & Usdan, 1994; McAdams, 1999; Thomas, 2001; Todras, 1993; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992; Thomas, 2001; Wagner, 1992). Relatedly, many school boards, particularly those in urban areas, have been faulted for their inability to collaborate with their superintendents (Danzberger, 1992; Danzberger et al., 1992; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992). Twenty of the 25 largest urban school districts experienced superintendent vacancies in 1990 (The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992). The inability of school board members to work together as a cohesive group also has drawn considerable criticism (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992, 1994; Danzberger et al., 1987, 1992; Danzberger & Usdan, 1994; McCloud & McKenzie, 1994; McGonagill, 1987; Rallis & Criscoe, 1993; Schlechty & Cole, 1993; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992; Wagoner, 1992). The influence of special interest groups additionally has elicited ire (Anderson, 1992; Merz, 1986; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1999). School board experts contend that school boards must change if they are to survive (Danzberger, 1994; Danzberger et al., 1992; Kirst, 1994; NSBF, 1999; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1999).

School Board Reforms

Proposed school board reforms typically focus on selection procedures for school board members or the role and responsibilities of school boards (Resnick, 1999). Alteration of selection procedures for members has been a popular focus of board reforms since the mid 1950s, and districts have used several different selection procedures. Experts still have not reached consensus regarding which procedure is best (Danzberger, 1992). Within the past two decades, several school board experts have called for states to pass legislation to refocus the role and responsibilities of school boards on policymaking and oversight, and limit school boards' management responsibilities. Under this plan, the redefined boards would be labeled local education policy boards. Selection procedures, followed by discussion of local education policy boards, are examined below.

Selection Procedures. Most often, school board members are elected at large (i.e., city-/district-wide), elected within subdivisions of the city/district, or appointed. Usually all

members are selected by the same procedure; however, some districts use a combination of the three previous options. Reformers and school board experts have advanced various arguments for and against elections and appointments. The focus has been on which procedure is superior for effective educational governance rather than which procedure works best under which circumstances or how the negative aspects of each procedure can be minimized.

One frequently advanced argument for at-large and subdistrict elections is that they give the public a voice in local education, and, in this respect, school boards are regarded as a fundamental democratic institution (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992, 1994; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1994; Johnson, 1988; Resnick, 1999; Underwood, 1992; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992). Critics, however, counter that there are not enough, and even fewer good, candidates who are willing to run for election in some districts and that voter turnout is very low in most elections (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger et al., 1987; Danzberger, 1992; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Hickle, 1998; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1994; Rallis & Criscoe, 1993; Resnick, 1999; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992; Thomas, 1993; Wagner, 1992). These critics interpret the failure of but a small percentage of the public to vote—5-15% of eligible voters is not unusual (Danzberger et al., 1992)—as evidence that the public does not value or need a voice in local education. Yet, there is evidence that when members of the public become dissatisfied, they vote in greater numbers (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1992).

When conducted independently of general political elections (e.g., at a different time of year, unassociated with party tickets), school board elections can insulate board members from undue influence and control by political groups (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992, 1994; Danzberger et al., 1987, 1992). As previously mentioned, separation from general government was a main goal in the creation and early 20th century reform of school boards. However, given the increasing cost of school board elections, particularly in urban areas, elected members may be susceptible to special interest and political groups who are eager to assist them with their election campaigns (Hickle, 1998; Underwood, 1992). Furthermore, some critics charge that it is a myth that elected school boards are apolitical and/or contend that insulation from political groups weakens the status and effectiveness of school boards by isolating them from political power structures and other governmental offices and resources (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992, 1994; Danzberger et al., 1987, 1992; Kirst & Bulkley, 2000; Thomas, 1993; Usdan, 1994; Wirt & Kirst, 1992).

At-large elections, the most common selection procedure, are more likely to retain demographically homogeneous individuals who are members of the professional elite—individuals who are well educated, successful, and tied to local business and community power structures (Boone, 1996; Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992, 1994; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1994; Robinson, England, & Meier, 1985; Thomas, 1993; Urban & Wagoner, 1996). Individuals elected at large, compared to those elected within subdistricts, may be more able to work together as a body and to concentrate on policy rather than administration, and be less susceptible to special interest groups as a result of their professional experience and representation of the entire community (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992, 1994; Kirst,

1994). The counter argument is that members elected at large may lack diversity and may not adequately represent the range of values and concerns of the various subpopulations within their districts (Boone, 1996; Danzberger, 1992, 1994; Danzberger et al., 1987, 1992; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1994; Robinson et al., 1985; Thomas, 1993). Furthermore, board members elected at large, though more likely than those elected within subdistricts to have elite professional experience, nevertheless may lack sufficient educational expertise to govern schools effectively (Thomas, 1993).

Most of the arguments for and against at-large elections also hold for subdistrict elections. The critical difference between these two selection procedures hinges on who is likely to win. Urban districts in the 1970s began increasingly shifting from at-large to subdistrict elections in order to increase the cultural, ethnic, racial, and political diversity of their school boards so that members would be more similar and responsive to subpopulations of constituents (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1994; Danzberger et al., 1987, 1992; Kirst, 1994; Robinson et al., 1985; Wagner, 1992). Critics contend, however, that subdistrict elections have resulted in more politicized boards whose members are more focused on single issues and special interests and, thus, less able to work productively as one body (Bradley, 1992; Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1994; Danzberger et al., 1987, 1992; Kirst, 1994; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992). At-large elections may better enable members to function as a body representing the entire system whereas subdistrict elections may predispose members to function as individual representatives of their respective district subpopulation (Bradley, 1992; Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1994; Danzberger et al., 1987, 1992; Kirst, 1994; Robinson et al., 1985; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992). In addition, members elected from subdistricts may have less professional experience and be less associated with powerful business and government leaders throughout the district than members elected at large (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger et al., 1987).

While many of the problems inherent in the election of board members may be circumvented by appointment procedures, this is highly dependent upon who is appointed and by whom. Culturally, ethnically, racially, and politically diverse individuals with extensive business management and/or educational experience who embrace the trusteeship ideology that the board should work as one body representing the entire community could be appointed, but the individual or individuals appointing members usually have wide discretion over whom they select and may not value these characteristics (Danzberger, 1992, 1994; Gewertz, 2000; Thomas, 1993; Underwood, 1992). Members of state or local government, such as mayors, usually appoint school board members. Thus, appointed boards likely are more closely aligned with local government than elected boards, which could have both negative and positive consequences as highlighted above. One of the most frequently advanced arguments against appointed boards is that they are less directly accountable to the public and more directly accountable to whomever appointed them (Danzberger, 1992). Indeed, most appointed school board members of a Virginia county school board reported that they were primarily accountable to the county board of supervisors, not the public (Danzberger, 1992). While those

who appoint the school board would, in most cases, be elected by, and accountable to, the public, they would not be responsible only for or judged solely according to their impact on education. In this respect, the public's voice in education would be muffled. On the other hand, appointment by mayors or other government officials could link school boards more closely to other government agencies and resources (Danzberger, 1994; ECS, 1999; Harrington-Lueker, 1996; Olson, 1992; Ziebarth, 1999).

School board experts have recommended numerous other proposals for the selection of school board members, several of which are mentioned here. Some experts recommend elections through political parties to give school boards greater political clout (Danzberger, 1992; Danzberger et al., 1987, 1992, 1993). Iannaccone and Lutz (1994) recommend dividing large urban districts into separate smaller districts (not subdistricts) to make school boards more representative of, and responsive to, their constituencies while avoiding gridlock caused by a diversity of competing interests. Suggested strategies to obtain good board member candidates range from providing members more perquisites to creating selection panels to recruit and screen potential candidates in accordance with state-mandated criteria (Danzberger, 1992; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992). Schlechty and Cole (1993) propose one of the most radical reforms—the election of school boards as one body. They recommend that slates of school board members apply and run for election to provide incentive for board members to work together, reduce the influence of special interests, and make boards, rather than individual members, accountable to their constituents. Under this plan, states could mandate the ethnic/racial composition of the board.

The arguments for and against at-large and subdistrict elections and appointments, as well as other proposed selection reforms, do not point to a clear solution for the most effective governance (Danzberger, 1992). For large cities, some experts recommend selection via appointment, with the mayor appointing the majority of members, and a combination of at-large and subdistrict elections only if necessary, for instance due to public demand (The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992; Wagner, 1992). Other experts recommend a combination of at-large and subdistrict elections in large cities (Danzberger et al., 1992). Danzberger (1992, p. 47) states that "one true method" of selection probably does not exist and recommends that states and communities choose their selection procedures based on their perceptions of which will work best for them.

Only limited research has been conducted in recent decades on the selection of school board members and the relation of selection procedures to effective governance and, more narrowly, students' academic achievement. This research indicates that subdistrict elections result in more contentious and fractured school boards rather than more effective governance, yet successfully draw a more heterogeneous group than at-large elections (Boone, 1996; Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992, 1994; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1994; Kirst, 1994; Robinson et al, 1985, Thomas, 1993; Urban & Wagoner, 1996). There is not yet convincing evidence that appointment of school board members produces more effective governance or greater academic achievement (Danzberger, 1992, 1994). Jersey City, New Jersey had an appointed

board and was the first district in the country to be taken over by the state, and Chicago had an appointed board in the 1980s when the U.S. Secretary of Education declared Chicago schools the worst in the county (Danzberger 1992, 1994). These examples provide evidence that appointments do not guarantee success for urban boards. However, Danzberger's (1992, p. 60) conclusion, based on research and anecdotal evidence, that "How school boards are selected is therefore not the determining variable in governing performance, except perhaps where boards are elected from individual electoral districts [i.e., subdistricts]," may be premature. While there are merits and demerits to each selection procedure, one method or a combination of methods may be more likely to result in effective governance under specific circumstances (Danzberger, 1994; Underwood, 1992). There has been insufficient research that includes situational variables such as district size and location, student demographics and achievement levels, community concerns, state and local government support, and district resources to rule out the impact of selection procedures on educational governance, and, more specifically, students' academic outcomes.

Local Education Policy Boards. Several prominent school board authorities have proposed that local school boards change into local education policy boards (Danzberger, 1992, 1994; Danzberger et al., 1992; Danzberger, Kirst, & Usdan, 1993; Kirst, 1994; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992).

The most essential characteristic of the local education policy boards is a focus on policy making and oversight without involvement in daily administration (Danzberger, 1992; Danzberger et al., 1992; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992). Local education policy boards are foremost responsible for setting an overall vision for education in their districts and, in alignment with this vision, establishing short- and long-term goals, school performance indicators, and assessments of students (Danzberger et al., 1992, 1993). The proposal for local education policy boards has received much attention partly because it is based on findings from the most comprehensive study of school boards of the past several decades, conducted by Carol and colleagues (1986), and other work sponsored by the Institute for Educational Leadership [IEL]. IEL has offered training/development programs for school board effectiveness and school leadership, which has facilitated refinement of the proposed local education policy boards reform. The West Virginia legislature urged school boards throughout the state to participate in this training and provided funds for it. Furthermore, after publication of the aforementioned comprehensive study, four of its six authors, namely Danzberger, Cunningham, Kirst, and Usdan, continued to work with and/or write about school boards, often in affiliation with IEL.

IEL has issued guidelines to assist states in redefining the role of school boards in a report entitled, "A framework for redefining the role and responsibilities of local school boards" (Danzberger et al., 1993). Deregulation is a critical component of the proposal; states must repeal legislation requiring school boards to be responsible for virtually every aspect of education, which experts contend compels them to become overly involved in administration (Danzberger, 1994; Danzberger et al., 1992; Kirst, 1994; Reid, 2000; The Twentieth Century

Fund, 1992). Furthermore, state legislation is necessary because school boards are unlikely to reform themselves, according to many critics (Danzberger, 1994; Danzberger et al., 1992, 1993; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992). Refocusing school boards on policymaking and oversight and restraining them from administration also are fundamental aspects of two educational governance models proposed by the Education Commission of the States (1999), John Carver's (1997) policy governance model, and reforms proposed by Goodman and Zimmerman (2000) to raise students' achievement.

Several other critical characteristics of the local education policy boards are delineated in Danzberger and colleagues' (1993) IEL report. Many of these characteristics are described in detail in the "Key Characteristics of Effective School Boards" section of this report, as they have been identified by numerous school board authorities as necessary for effective governance. As is pointed out in that section, however, little research exists to substantiate that these characteristics are related to the effective governance that fosters students' academic achievement. The IEL report also recommends that legislators pass legislation that encourages school districts to increase site-based management, authorizes school boards to approve charter schools and/or contract out the management of their schools, and authorizes the establishment of local children's policy councils to oversee coordinated education, health, and social services for all children and families within the district. These recommendations are controversial; there is limited data to support them and limited consensus among educational scholars and practitioners regarding them (Arnsparger, McElhinney, & Ziebarth, 1999; Ziebarth, 1999). Murphy and Beck (1995), for example, found that moving to site-based management had zero to slightly negative effects on student achievement. The lack of sufficient data to justify the adoption of proposed reforms is also a common refrain in the next section on educational governance reforms.

Educational Governance Reforms

Federal and state governments and local districts have implemented a variety of educational governance reforms and experimentation is likely to continue as a logical extension of the systemic/restructuring reform movement begun in the 1990s. Educational governance experts vary in how they define and classify these reforms (Danzberger, 1992; Danzberger et al., 1992; ECS, 1999; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992; Ziebarth, 1999). The locus of decision-making authority, parental choice of schools, and the influence of the market on the survival and evolution of schools are critical elements of the reforms. Here, two of the most popular reforms, site-based management and charter schools, are presented. Then two of the most radical reforms, state and mayoral takeovers and elimination of school boards, are discussed. The school board's role and responsibilities in the educational governance reforms examined are not well established, with the obvious exception of elimination.

Site-based Management. Site-based management, also referred to as school-based management, involves the shift of decision-making authority and control from the school

board and central administration to individual schools. It has been a popular reform in the past two decades (Drury, 1998; Hofman, 1995; Leithwood & Menzies, 1998; Olson, 1992; Oswald, 1995; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992; Ziebarth, 1999). Reformers argue that schools and educators cannot effectively improve students' academic achievement or be held accountable for student outcomes unless they have decision-making authority (Lindle 1995/1996; Ziebarth, 1999). Advocates contend that those directly connected to the school (a) are in the best position to make decisions according to students' needs, (b) are invigorated by site-based management and more willing to implement reforms, and (c) benefit from an improved school climate (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998; Oswald, 1995; Peterson, 1991; Ziebarth, 1999). Critics of site-based management contend that (a) such management usually requires a significant time commitment from school personnel that may detract from students' academic achievement, (b) many teachers do not support site-based management, and (c) there is no solid theoretical argument that site-based management will improve teaching quality and students' academic achievement (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998; Oswald, 1995; Ziebarth, 1999).

Most states have legislated site-based management in the form of pilot programs, recommendations, and, less frequently, mandatory programs (Ziebarth, 1999). Districts and schools adopting site-based management vary in the loci and scope of decision-making authority (Lindle, 1995/1996, Leithwood & Menzies, 1998; Ziebarth, 1999). Indeed, definitions of site-based management vary greatly (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998; Oswald, 1995; Peterson, 1991; Ziebarth, 1999). Control under site-based management is typically held by principals, teachers, community members (including parents), or a combination of professionals and community members (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998). Individual schools often form local councils to make decisions and/or advise the principal (Oswald, 1995). Decision-making authority for personnel decisions, budgeting and curriculum are among the most common responsibilities assumed by individual schools and local councils (Oswald, 1995).

Several reviews of studies of site-based management have been conducted; no compelling link between site-based management and students' academic achievement was found (Gleason, Donohue, & Leader, 1995/1996; Leithwood & Menzies, 1998; Murphy & Beck, 1995; Oswald, 1995; Ziebarth, 1999). Some advocates claim that variation in site-based management and failure of many schools and local councils to exercise full decision-making authority account for the absence of compelling positive findings (Oswald, 1995; Peterson, 1991). Some supporters claim that 3-15 years of site-based management are required before a positive impact on students' academic achievement is seen (Oswald, 1995; Peterson, 1991).

With the devolution of decision-making authority to individual schools, the role and responsibilities of the school board often have been unclear, and the lack of clarity and reluctance of school boards to cede their authority, particularly when the state may still hold them accountable for their schools, has hindered successful reform (Danzberger, 1992; Danzberger et al., 1992; Harp, 1992; Lindle, 1995/1996; Olson, 1992; Oswald, 1995). For example, schools in Kentucky began moving toward site-based management with the passage

of the Kentucky Education Reform Act in 1990 (Danzberger et al., 1992; Harp, 1992; Lindle, 1995/1996). The legislation called for the creation of school-based decision-making councils and granted these councils governance authority over 16 areas of school operations and policy, but councils did not always assume authority over all of these areas, and more than one school board went to court to maintain or regain control over local schools (Harp, 1992; Lindle, 1995/1996). School board authorities have advocated a critical oversight role for boards in site-based management, but virtually no research has explicitly evaluated the school boards' role in this form of governance (Drury, 1998; Resnick, 1999). Researchers also has not evaluated the decision-making ability and governance effectiveness of local councils in comparison to local school boards, nor have they examined which division of responsibilities between the school board and local councils and/or principals works best under which circumstances. Furthermore, while advocates may claim that site-based management improves communication between school boards, district personnel, and school decision-makers, strong empirical evidence is lacking and contrary examples are available (Lindle, 1995/1996; Oswald, 1995).

Charter Schools. Charter schools are an increasingly common educational governance reform (Collins, 1999; Hadderman, 1998; Swartz, 1996; Ziebarth, 1999). They allow freedom from rules, regulations, and bureaucracy, which are thought to hamper innovation and effectiveness, in exchange for production of specified outcomes within a set timeframe; in other words, autonomy is offered in exchange for accountability (Collins, 1999; Danzberger, 1992; ECS, 1999; Hadderman, 1998; Olson, 1992; Schwartz, 1996; Ziebarth, 1999). An outgrowth of the systemic/restructuring reform movement of the 1990s, charter schools also meet some demands for deregulation (i.e., greater flexibility), parental choice, site-based management, and market control over education while remaining under the aegis of public education (Collins, 1999; Danzberger, 1992; Danzberger et al., 1992; Hadderman, 1998; Schwartz, 1996; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992; Ziebarth, 1999). Advocates of charter schools claim that they challenge traditional educational governance and provide the impetus for improvements throughout the districts in which they live (Collins, 1999; Schwartz, 1996). They also allow for more private involvement in public education; private, for-profit organizations can obtain charters and often contribute funding to charter schools (Collins, 1999; Olson, 1992; Schwartz, 1996). Critics contend that charter schools siphon needed funds from other schools in the district and encourage the privatization of education (Collins, 1999).

Parents, teachers, community groups, and private organizations can seek approval for charter schools from the state or local school district, usually via the school board (ECS, 1999; Schwartz, 1996; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992; Ziebarth, 1999). In 1991, Minnesota became the first state to pass legislation authorizing charter schools (Collins, 1999; Hadderman, 1998; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992). The majority of states have since passed similar legislation (Collins, 1999; ECS, 1999; Hadderman, 1998; Schwartz, 1996; Ziebarth, 1999). In general, charter schools are nonselective, nonsectarian, nondiscriminatory, and tuition-free (Hadderman, 1998; Schwartz, 1996; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992).

They receive public, per-pupil funds (Schwartz, 1996; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992). States differ, however, in the amount of autonomy they allow charter schools, and, consequently, charter schools across the nation vary widely in philosophy, organization, and operation (Collins, 1999; Hadderman, 1998; Schwartz, 1996; Ziebarth, 1999). States that allow greater autonomy tend to have more charter schools (Hadderman, 1998). States and local agencies also vary in the accountability standards to which they hold charter schools (Schwartz, 1996).

Research on charter schools is limited and so far provides mixed evidence of their ability to produce high academic achievement or better outcomes than nonchartered public schools (Collins, 1999; ECS, 1999; Hadderman, 1998; Ziebarth, 1999). Examples of schools that have successfully raised academic achievement appear in the literature, but studies have not isolated the characteristics that contribute to their success (Hadderman, 1998; Ziebarth, 1999). The U.S. Department of Education is sponsoring two national studies of charter schools, but academic outcomes are not yet available (Collins, 1999; Hadderman, 1998; Ziebarth, 1999). Preliminary findings show that charter schools tend to attract racial and ethnic minority students in equal, or somewhat greater, numbers than local public schools, but slightly fewer special needs and limited English proficient students (Collins, 1999; Hadderman, 1998). In urban areas, minority students attend, but these students tend not to be the most disadvantaged and vulnerable (Schwartz, 1996).

Although most chartered schools remain part of the local district, school boards may be reluctant to govern them because their role and responsibilities with respect to these schools are not well established (Hadderman, 1998; Ziebarth, 1999). Some school board experts have stated that local school boards can maintain a policymaking and oversight role over charter schools and that these schools are an effective mechanism to prevent school boards from involvement in daily management of schools (Danzberger, 1992; Olson, 1992). However, school boards' liability for schools over which they have little control has been questioned (Collins, 1999; NSBF, 1999; Olson, 1992; Ziebarth, 1999). Insufficient attention has been directed toward the school boards' role in promoting charter schools' effectiveness in raising students' academic achievement or in ensuring that charter schools do not drain needed resources from regular public schools. The question of how school boards should handle charter schools that are failing to produce agreed-upon outcomes, including how to assist the students who attend these schools, has received little attention. Revoking or failing to renew a charter likely has negative repercussions.

Contracting out is one variation on the typical charter school arrangement. Instead of individuals applying for charters for individual schools, local or state authorities initiate the process and contract out management of individual schools or districts (Danzberger, 1992; Olson, 1992; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992). The school board can, but is not required to, retain policy-making and goal-setting responsibilities and oversee accountability (Danzberger, 1992). The Chelsea, Massachusetts school board contracted out the management and oversight of its entire school system to Boston University and retained very little control

of the district (Danzberger, 1992; Olson, 1992; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992). Another variation involves school boards overseeing a portfolio of schools through charters with a variety of different organizations (ECS, 1999; Olson, 1992). One of two models of educational governance proposed by the Education Commission of the States (ECS, 1999) calls for a system of publicly funded, publicly authorized, independently operated schools. Under this plan, school boards would become chartering boards that would authorize, monitor, channel funds to, and hold accountable, but not operate, the independent schools within their communities. While state boards of education could serve this function, local boards are considered better able to select and oversee schools in keeping with local needs and priorities.

State and Mayoral Takeovers. State and mayoral takeovers of schools and districts are becoming increasingly common, particularly in urban districts (Danzberger, 1992; ECS, 1999; Harrington-Lueker, 1996; Resnick, 1999; Ziebarth, 1999). Takeovers occur due to subpar academic achievement, as measured by achievement test scores, as well as fiscal mismanagement and administrative ineptitude or corruption. In 1989, New Jersey became the first state to take control of a local school district exhibiting chronically low academic performance (Danzberger, 1992; Ziebarth, 1999). As of early 2001, 24 states had passed academic bankruptcy legislation that grants states the authority to assume control over, and management of, failing schools and districts, and 15 states had authority to take over individual failing schools within districts (ECS, 2001). In state takeovers, usually the state legislature, a federal court, or the state board of education transfers management responsibility for a local district or school to the state department of education for a specified amount of time (Ziebarth, 1999). Although the balance between state and local control varies in takeover situations, the shift of control from representative to executive leadership signifies a fundamental change in local educational governance (ECS, 2001; Cibulka, 2001; Ziebarth, 1999). Indeed, takeovers may violate local voter rights in some states, a possibility that has prompted the U.S. Department of Justice's involvement (ECS, 2001; Ziebarth, 1999).

The state has granted authority for the school system to the mayor in several urban districts, including Chicago, Boston, Detroit, and Cleveland (Danzberger, 1992; ECS, 1999, 2001; Harrington-Lueker, 1996; Kirst & Bulkley, 2001; Resnick, 1999; Ziebarth, 1999). Mayors also may assume control via ballot initiatives, as has occurred in Oakland, California (Honig, 2001). In the past, mayors generally eschewed involvement in schools, but now many urban mayors campaign on school issues and are more directly involved (Kirst & Buckley, 2001; Shipps, 2001). Failing schools, mismanaged and inefficient budgets, ineffective management by school boards and district administrators, union strangleholds, flight of the middle class, and other factors have prompted more involvement (Kirst & Buckley, 2001; Shipps, 2001). Mayors have come to view quality schools as essential to their cities' economic survival as federal aid to cities has declined, and business leaders have become more concerned about the need for quality schools to produce a quality workforce (Kirst & Buckley, 2001; Shipps, 2001). Mayors who assume control of educational governance generally rely

upon a corporate model of organization and decision making, and many have the authority to appoint the superintendent (Kirst & Buckley, 2001; Shipps, 2001).

Proponents of state and mayoral takeovers contend that takeovers focus accountability on whomever is appointed control at a time in which numerous groups (e.g., federal, state, and local governments; business leaders; teachers' unions; special interest groups; the courts; district administrators; individual school administrators and local councils, school boards, voters, and parents) compete for control of the school system (Danzberger, 1994; Harrington-Lueker, 1996; Kirst, 1994; Kirst & Buckley, 2001; Shipps, 2001). In addition, supporters argue that state takeovers garner more political and financial support for education, encourage greater collaboration between general and educational governance, provide more widely and better integrated services to students and families, increase the collaboration between superintendents and school boards (both are usually appointed in these instances), reduce the influence of special interests, and motivate schools and districts to improve in order to prevent the loss of, or to resume, local control (Danzberger, 1994; ECS, 1999; Harrington-Lueker, 1996; Kirst & Buckley, 2001; Olson, 1992; Shipps, 2001; Ziebarth, 1999). In contrast, opponents argue that (a) state officials and mayors are not necessarily better able to oversee local schools than school boards and district administrators; (b) states are less responsiveness to local issues; (c) state officials and mayors have too many other concerns and responsibilities; (d) education becomes less visible and loses public support; (e) state officials and mayors may grant contracts for education-related services in return for campaign contributions; and, (f) perhaps most fundamentally, local voters and disempowered and/or unorganized groups have less control over local education (Carol et al., 1986; ECS, 1999; Harrington-Lueker, 1996; Kirst & Buckley, 2001; Olson, 1992; Resnick, 1999; Shipps, 2001; Ziebarth, 1999). In takeover situations, those who assume control of a school or school system generally are permitted, and/or have by virtue of their positions, greater flexibility and power in governance—for instance in contract negotiations with teachers' unions—than those previously in charge (Kirst & Buckley, 2001; Shipps, 2001).

Little research has evaluated the success of state and mayoral takeovers. Variations in the precipitating factors, organizational structure, replacement of personnel and/or school board, redefinition of roles and responsibilities, as well as other factors, complicate comparisons (ECS, 2001; Kirst & Buckley, 2001; Shipps, 2001; Ziebarth, 1999). The limited findings suggest that takeovers improve financial and administrative management and relations with teachers' unions (ECS, 1999; Kirst & Buckley, 2001; Shipps, 2001; Ziebarth, 1999). Takeovers, however, appear to have mixed effects on students' academic achievement (ECS, 1999, 2001; Ziebarth, 1999). Some researchers have concluded that unless those who assume control focus on curriculum and instruction, academic achievement is unlikely to improve (Kirst & Buckley, 2001). Even in districts where test scores rise, some groups may not benefit. An in-depth study of the mayoral takeover in Chicago found that, as some critics of takeover warn, poor and African American individuals now have less input than more powerful groups

such as business leaders and members of the middle class, and poor and minority students have suffered academically (Shipps, 2001).

When takeovers occur, the local school board can be eliminated, replaced, or restricted to an advisory role (Bushweller, 1998; NSBF, 1999; Ziebarth, 1999). School board experts have not stipulated what the best role for boards is in takeover situations. Ironically, Clarice L. Chambers, the president of the National School Boards Association, had been a member of the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, school board for 25 years when the mayor assumed control and changed the locks on the board's conference room (Johnston, 2001). New laws permitted the school board on which Chambers served to meet only six times per year and reduced its function to budget approval or disapproval. One district takeover suggests that the school board may play an important role in ensuring that takeovers result in improved academic outcomes. In Logan County, West Virginia, state takeover preceded improved student attendance, performance, and dropout rates (Bushweller, 1998; Ziebarth, 1999). The state superintendent attributes some of the success to the retention, though in a restricted capacity, of the local school board (Bushweller, 1998; Ziebarth, 1999). Studies of state and mayoral takeovers need to examine more thoroughly the role and effectiveness of school boards in these situations.

Elimination of School Boards. Some critics of current educational governance have charged that school boards are anachronistic and/or chronically ineffective and have advocated their demise (Carol et al., 1986; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Finn, 1991; Olson, 1992; Olson & Bradley, 1992; Streshly & Frase, 1993; Whitson, 1998). One proposal that has received much attention involves eliminating the school board as a "middleman" between states and individual schools, allowing parents unrestricted choice of which schools their children attend, and funneling money directly to the schools they select (Danzberger, 1992; Danzberger et al., 1992; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Olson, 1992; Streshly & Frase, 1993; Wang & Walberg, 1999). According to proponents of this plan, the competitive market would pressure schools to excel in order to survive and weed out weakly performing schools (Danzberger, 1992; Danzberger et al., 1992; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Olson, 1992; Streshly & Frase, 1993). The state would have oversight responsibility to ensure equity, minimal quality standards, and the accountability of individual schools (Danzberger, 1992; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Olson, 1992; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992). In an extension of this plan, vouchers would be authorized to allow children to attend private schools with public funds and/or states would enter into charter agreements with private schools (Danzberger et al., 1992; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Olson, 1992; Streshly & Frase, 1993).

There is some research, though contested, to support a state-monitored system of independent schools (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Ziebarth, 1999). The success of Catholic schools in educating students figures prominently in this research (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Ziebarth, 1999). A state-monitored system of independent schools would radically and fundamentally alter educational governance, particularly if it included use of public funds for private schools. Nevertheless, existing charter schools and voucher programs are steps in the direction of a

state-monitored system of independent schools (Arnsparger et al., 1999; Danzberger et al., 1992). Interestingly, although Hawaii has functioned without local school boards and relied upon a state board of education to set policy, research comparing educational governance in Hawaii to educational governance in other states is lacking.

Critics have advocated at least two other proposals that would eliminate local school boards. One proposal calls for local educational governance to be incorporated as a department in the city or county government (Danzberger, 1992; Danzberger et al., 1992; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992). Mayoral takeovers are a step in this direction, but, to date, most states and/or mayors have retained a separate local board for educational governance (Danzberger, 1992; Olson, 1992). Another proposal centers on the creation of a local board or group that would oversee integrated, comprehensive education, health, and social services for children and families (Cunningham, 1993; Danzberger, 1992; Olson, 1992; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992). Proponents of these children's policy boards or well-being commissions, as they have been deemed, argue that they would ensure a continuum of care without duplication of services for all children and their families (Cunningham, 1993; Danzberger, 1992; Olson, 1992; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992). These two proposals have rarely, if ever, been fully implemented, although examples of boards, districts, and individual schools that foster the integration of education, health, and social services can be found. The first adoption of the city government proposal might occur soon. In Boston, a parent activist group worked to put a measure on the November 2001 ballot that would transfer school system leadership from the mayor and his appointed school board to the city council (Johnston, 2001). The group perceived the mayor to be too removed from the school system and insufficiently accountable (Johnston, 2001).

Some school board authorities caution that the country may be too hastily abandoning traditional educational governance, in which school boards occupy a crucial position, without sufficient public dialog regarding the possible consequences of such change (Danzberger et al., 1992; Harrington-Lueker, 1996; Olson, 1992; Resnick, 1999; Shanker, 1989; Ziebarth, 1999). Most models of educational governance that propose elimination of local school boards retain a governing or oversight board that would function somewhat similarly to how school boards are intended to function, but with less direct opportunity for control by the local community, raising compelling questions about the superiority of these models (Danzberger, 1992; Olson, 1992; Resnick, 1999; Shanker, 1989). Shanker (1989, p. 30) writes, "Abolishing school boards because of problems in school governance would be like abolishing Congress or state legislatures in the name of efficiency." Unfortunately, the general public appears to have a limited understanding of the role and responsibilities of school boards, restricting the ability of citizens to understand or contribute to debate about the elimination of school boards (Carol et al., 1986).

Conclusion

School boards currently face considerable pressures and criticisms from a variety of sources. Many business and political leaders, educators, school board and educational governance experts, and members of the public advocate school board and educational governance reforms, but there is little consensus regarding which reform is optimal (Arnsparger et al., 1999, Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992, 1994; Danzberger et al., 1992; Kirst, 1994; NSBF, 1999; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1999; Renchler, 2000; Ziebarth, 1999). Education scholars have proposed reforming the selection procedures for school board members; restricting the school board's role and responsibilities to focus on policy, rather than administration; and reconfiguring educational governance. A variety of educational governance reforms have been implemented, including site-based management, charter schools, and state and mayoral takeovers, but the school board's role in these has not been well established.

Many of the recent educational governance reforms constrain or alter the traditional operation of school boards, and some call for its elimination. However, little discussion and even less research has focused on how school boards can operate most effectively within these new governance structures or what the consequences of school board elimination would be (Danzberger, 1992; Renchler, 2000; Ziebarth, 1999). In addition, little attention has been devoted to the contextual factors that might determine which, if any, reform is likely to be successful in specific situations. The source of much of the dissatisfaction with school boards and impetus for their reform is the poor performance of urban schools. Reforms generated for urban schools might not be appropriate for nonurban schools. Danzberger and colleagues (1992) state that one best governance structure may not exist for public education. While perhaps true, this conclusion begs for research to examine which governance structure is most effective under which circumstances and for whom. All students might not benefit equally, as appears to be the case in Chicago's mayoral takeover (Shipps, 2001). Furthermore, studies of school board and educational governance reforms should not only carefully examine how the school boards function under the various reforms, but also identify the features that make them effective. In the next section, critical characteristics of effective school boards are discussed.

Key Characteristics of Effective School Boards

The school board literature is populated with opinion-based articles and guidebooks that cover a range of topics from how to formulate education policy to the improvement of board meeting minutes (Hange & Leary, 1991; Rallis & Criscoe, 1993). School board organizations, experts, and members have identified characteristics that they consider essential for effective governance; little data, however, exists to substantiate that these characteristics are indeed essential for students' academic achievement. Review of the education literature yielded only

one quantitative study, conducted in the Netherlands, in which aspects of school board governance were measured and linked to academic outcomes (Hofman, 1995). Because this study provides the best example of quantitative research on school board effectiveness but was not conducted in the United States, it is discussed in more detail in the concluding section, "Directions for Future Research." Characteristics that school board experts frequently have identified as important are described in this section and organized under the following subheadings: *appropriate overarching foci*, which include a focus on students' academic achievement and attention to policy, not administration; *good relations* with the superintendent, between board members, with other local agencies, and with the public and state; *effective performance* in the areas of policymaking, leadership, and budgeting; and, *adequate evaluation and training*. Research is presented where possible. The majority of findings show that many school boards do not exhibit the characteristics that experts have deemed critical for effective governance and students' academic achievement.

Appropriate Overarching Foci

Students' Academic Achievement. Resnick (1999) states that school boards have traditionally focused on financial, legal, and constituent issues, and have left responsibility for students' academic achievement to their administrators and educators. Today, however, school boards risk being judged ineffective if they do not develop policies and support programs explicitly designed to improve students' academic achievement, oversee and evaluate the implementation and performance of these policies and programs, and demonstrate improved and/or high academic achievement (Carol et al., 1986; NSBF, 1999; Resnick, 1999; Speer, 1998). The National School Boards Foundation [NSBF] (1999) proclaimed that a school board's primary goal must be to improve academic achievement. The NSBF released the 1999 report, *Leadership Matters: Transforming Urban School Boards*, to help school boards improve students' academic achievement. The National School Boards Association [NSBA] has urged local school boards to make the improvement of student achievement a major objective (Speer, 1998). The NSBA published Bracey and Resnick's (1998) guidebook, *Raising the Bar: A School Board Primer on Student Achievement*, Speer's (1998) report, *Reaching for Excellence: What Local School Districts Are Doing to Raise Student Achievement*, and Amundson & Richardson's (1991) handbook, *Straight As: Accountability, Assessment, Achievement*.

In addition to national organizations, state and local groups have begun working to focus school boards on academic achievement. The Iowa Association of School Boards [IASB] (2000) has begun a pilot program, based on its own research, described below, to provide support and training at several Iowa sites to improve students' academic achievement. The California School Board Association recently shepherded a project entitled "Targeting Student Learning: The School Board's Role as Policymaker," one aim of which was to bring policy staff from five state board associations together to identify school board policies that

are critical to improving student learning. The Kansas City Consensus, a group funded through donations from local corporations, foundations, and individuals, convened a School Governance Task Force and released the 2001 report, *Steer, Not Row: How to Strengthen Local School Boards and Improve Student Learning*. In the report, the task force stated that it "defined *effectiveness* in terms of student learning, as that is the only indicator that matters" (p. 6). The Educational Research Service and the New England School Development Council released Goodman, Fulbright, and Zimmerman's (1997) guidebook, *Getting There From Here: School Board-Superintendent Collaboration: Creating a School Governance Team Capable of Raising Student Achievement* and Goodman and Zimmerman's (2000) report, *Thinking Differently: Recommendations for 21st Century School Board/Superintendent Leadership, Governance, and Teamwork for High Student Achievement*.

School board members and district staffs also express a need for school boards to focus on achievement. In a 1997-1998 national survey, school board members identified student achievement as their foremost concern (ASBJ, 1998). School board presidents, superintendents, and high school principals in a survey of 92 Wisconsin school districts frequently recommended concentration on student achievement and school improvement as a change that would improve the effectiveness of their school boards (Anderson, 1992). Unfortunately, a lack of time and established procedures, as well as the demands of numerous crises, often may preclude many school boards from devoting time directly to the improvement of students' academic ach..vement (Carol et al., 1986). In addition, board members may need specific instruction on the use of educational outcome measures to monitor students' progress and to hold themselves and their schools accountable. In a survey of 216 board chairpersons from nine major metropolitan area districts in nine states and several rural districts in three additional states, many board members reported that they need to spend more time on students' education (Carol et al., 1986). In a recent NSBA survey, 36% to 48% of 955 urban, suburban, and rural school board presidents reported that they were not confident that their boards understand what the state student assessment tests administered in their districts measure (Speer, 1998). Some educational governance and accountability experts recommend that school boards use other measures of students' achievement such as data on absence, grades, enrollment in advanced placement classes, honor roll attainment, retention, promotion, dropout, scholarship awards, graduation, and college matriculation (Amundson & Richardson, 1991; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Resnick, 1999).

Although increasing attention is being given to the school board's impact on students' academic achievement, limited research exists to substantiate the importance of this role and provide guidance to school boards on how to perform this role effectively (Goodman, Fulbright, & Zimmerman, 1997; NSBF, 1999). Generally, experts and guidebooks advise school boards to focus on academic achievement by establishing a vision for educational excellence, advocating for the vision inside and outside the school system, providing the resources and structure necessary to achieve the vision, and holding programs and people accountable for success (Bracy & Resnick, 1998; Goodman et al., 1997; Speer, 1998).

Research is needed to identify and measure, more concretely and specifically than the broad guidelines typically delineated by experts, the key variables through which school boards affect students' academic achievement.

Two studies constitute significant steps in the study of school board effects on students' academic achievement, one by Goodman and colleagues (1997), which is discussed first here, and one by the IASB (2000). Goodman and colleagues (1997), in a study of 10 districts in 5 states, found that districts with quality governance tended to have greater student achievement as measured by dropout rates, the percentage of students going on to college, and aptitude test scores. However, the researchers did not describe how the quality governance variables were measured, nor did they analyze the degree to which the variables individually or together were linked to the achievement outcomes. Instead, the researchers described the characteristics that typified quality governance in their sample.

The characteristics that Goodman and colleagues identified as elements of quality governance included

- focus by the board on student achievement and policy,
- effective management by the board without micromanagement,
- a trusting and collaborative relationship between the board and superintendent,
- creation by the board of conditions and structures that allowed the superintendent to function as the CEO and instructional leader of the district,
- evaluation of the superintendent according to mutually agreed upon procedures,
- effective communication between the board chair and superintendent and among board members,
- effective board communication with the community,
- board adoption of a budget that provided needed resources,
- governance retreats for evaluation and goal setting purposes,
- monthly school board meetings for which the superintendent drafted the agenda, and
- long-term service of board members and superintendents.

In contrast, poor governance was characterized by

- micro-management by the board,
- role confusion between the board and superintendent,
- interpersonal conflict between the board chair and the superintendent,
- poor communication by the superintendent to the board,
- lack of trust and respect between the superintendent and the board,
- bickering among board members or between board members and the superintendent,
- board member actions reflecting their personal interests,

- board members' disregard for the agenda process and the chain-of-command,
- board members' playing to the news media, and
- limited commitment by board members to improving governance.

Findings from this study form the basis of recommendations by Goodman and colleagues (1997) and Goodman and Zimmerman (2000) emphasizing the importance of teamwork between the school board as a united body and the superintendent. They also call for ongoing team-building education and development in order for the school board and superintendent to achieve high quality, collaborative governance that effectively improves students' educational attainment.

The IASB (2000) examined school board and superintendent functioning in Georgia school districts. It compared three districts in which students had performed poorly for 3 consecutive years on standardized achievement tests and a variety of other unspecified indicators to three demographically similar districts in which students had performed high for the same period on similar measures. The districts ranged in size from 1,395 to 5,163 students. The research team, which was not informed in advance of the performance status of the districts, interviewed 159 board members, superintendents, and school personnel regarding seven critical conditions for school renewal selected from the research literature on effective schools and school improvement and change. These conditions were: shared leadership; continuous improvement and shared decision making; ability to create and sustain initiatives; supportive workplace; staff development; support for school sites through data and information; and community involvement.

The major differences between high- and low-performing districts were as follows:

- Board members, superintendents, and school personnel in high-achieving districts believed that they could elevate students' academic achievement while those in low-achieving districts believed significant barriers constrained improvement;
- School board members in the high-achieving districts demonstrated greater understanding of, and influence related to, the aforementioned seven critical conditions for school improvement and could identify and describe school improvement initiatives and the boards' role in supporting them;
- In high achieving districts, the school boards' focus on school improvement initiatives was shared by school personnel and linked to building- and classroom-level actions.

In contrast to Goodman and colleagues'(1997) study, all the school boards in the IASB study had peaceable relationships with their superintendents and were satisfied with them. Similar to Goodman and colleagues' research, the IASB study documented differences between high- and low-achieving schools and did not analyze whether or how strongly each individual difference was related to students' academic achievement.

While the previous findings are informative, they have significant limitations. Additional comparative case studies and quantitative research, both cross sectional and longitudinal, linking specific school board policies and actions to students' academic outcomes, are needed in order to demonstrate more comprehensively the importance of school boards in raising and sustaining students' academic achievement. The key variables that allow school boards to focus effectively on and improve students' academic achievement need further elucidation. Accountability for students' academic achievement tends to lie more with the superintendent, other administrators, and teachers than with the school board. In a recent NSBA survey, only 21% of superintendents surveyed in consultation with school board presidents reported that they feel it is very important to hold boards accountable for raising student achievement, whereas 56% of superintendents stated that holding teachers accountable is very important (Speer, 1998). Solid evidence that school boards can positively impact students' academic achievement could guide and improve school board effectiveness; could encourage school boards and others to hold school boards accountable, fairly and beneficially, for students' educational progress; and may ameliorate the poor reputation of school boards among critics who view them as outdated and deleterious.

Policy, Not Administration. As a result of the school board reform movement of the early 1900s, school boards retained policymaking as their primary responsibility and appropriated administrative duties to superintendents (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992; Urban & Wagoner, 1996). Many educational governance experts continue to promulgate this separation of responsibilities (Campbell & Greene, 1994; Carver, 1997; Danzberger et al., 1992, 1993; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; IASB, 1996; McGonagill, 1987; NSBF, 1999; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992). The encroachment of school boards into the daily administration of their districts elicits strong reproach (Carol et al., 1986; Carver, 1997; Danzberger & Usdan, 1994; McAdams, 1999; Todras, 1993; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992; Wagner, 1992). Resnick (1999) writes that micromanagement is likely the most common and often deserved criticism of school boards. According to The Twentieth Century Fund (1992):

> What has made many school boards an obstacle to—rather than a force for—fundamental education reform? Our answer: The tendency for most boards to micromanage, to become immersed in the day-to-day administration of their districts that is properly the realm of the professional administrator. (pp. 2, 5)

Focusing school boards on policymaking and oversight and restricting them from administrative management is a major platform of school board reforms proposed by The Twentieth Century Fund (1992) Task Force, the Institute of Educational Leadership (Danzberger et al., 1992, 1993), and the Education Commission of the States (ECS, 1999).

A variety of studies documents that some school boards are involved in the daily administration of their schools and that some board members are not clear about the distinction between their and the superintendents' roles and, relatedly, between policy and administration. Goodman and colleagues (1997) found that role confusion between the board and the

superintendent and micromanagement by the board were two elements of low-quality governance that characterized districts with low student achievement. In a 1988-90 study of 250 urban, suburban, and rural/small-town school boards from 16 states, school boards rated themselves as not very effective in avoiding involvement in administrative duties (Danzberger et al., 1992). In a study of 304 superintendents in Nebraska, the second most frequently reported critical conflict between a superintendent and a school board or board member centered on role confusion (Grady & Bryant, 1991). Wisconsin school board presidents, superintendents, and high school principals from 92 districts frequently suggested that clarification of policy and administrative responsibilities would improve board effectiveness (Anderson, 1992). Board members in Carol and colleagues' (1986) study reported that an unclearly defined policymaking role and lack of clarity regarding how to distinguish it from the administrators' role hampered the boards' ability to bolster their policymaking. In addition, two separate analyses of school board meeting minutes in West Virginia and Utah found that only 3% and 8.3%, respectively, of board decisions focused on policy making and policy oversight (Hange & Leary, 1991; Van Alfen & Schmidt, 1997). Data such as these, coupled with the conviction that separation of policy and administrative responsibilities is critical for good educational governance, have prompted several reformers to advocate that states codify these role distinctions and explicitly confine school boards to policymaking and policy oversight (Danzberger et al., 1992; 1993; ECS, 1999; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992).

However, the often-stated maxim that school boards should concentrate on policy and leave administration to their superintendents and other district administrators is simplistic, and there is limited research to substantiate that strict separation of roles is essential for effective governance (Campbell & Greene, 1994; Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger et al., 1992). The roles of the school board and superintendent are highly interdependent, making complete separation of policymaking and administration impractical, if not impossible. For instance, the school board typically depends on the superintendent and his or her staff for information on which to base its decisions, thereby allowing the administration to influence policy making via the information it provides (Carol et al., 1986; McGonagill, 1987; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992). In addition, one of the school board's chief responsibilities is the hiring, evaluation, and firing of the superintendent, all administrative duties. Advocates of role separation often do not provide detailed instructions for separation can be accomplished and maintained. Separation advocates who proscribe micromanagement by the school board usually do not specify what constitutes micromanagement but sometimes indicate that daily involvement in administration qualifies. However, problems associated with daily board involvement in administration would not necessarily warrant full-scale prohibition of the school board from administration.

Different board and superintendent personalities, leadership styles, and situations may necessitate intermixing policy and administration (McGonagill, 1987). Case studies of nine metropolitan school districts found both negative and positive exceptions to the often-

advocated separation of roles (Carol et al., 1986). When the board and superintendent have a good working relationship and there are processes for diffusing tensions that arise over the division of responsibilities—characteristics that are more commonly found in more racially, ethnically, and politically homogeneous districts—separation of policy and administration does not appear to be necessary for effective governance (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger et al., 1987). In contrast to the clear division endorsed by many educational governance experts, McGonagill (1987), Carol and colleagues (1986), and Danzberger and colleagues (1987) recommend that individual boards and their superintendents apportion the policymaking and administrative responsibilities as best suits them and continually evaluate and reassess the arrangement.

Additional research is needed to determine which distribution of responsibilities under which circumstances leads to more effective governance and improved academic outcomes. At present, there is insufficient evidence that a complete separation of the policymaking and administrative roles between the school board and the superintendent and his/her staff, respectively, is essential or feasible for effective governance. Researchers need to develop detailed definitions of the policymaking and administrative roles and valid measures of each role. The percentage of meeting time that school boards spend on policy-related decision making and oversight has been used as a measure of how involved school boards are in policymaking, for example. However, it is not known if school boards that spend a greater portion of their meetings on policy-related decision making and oversight govern more effectively, are less involved in administration, and have improved or better academic achievement in their districts.

Good Relations

Superintendent Relations. Some school board experts consider a board's most important responsibility to be hiring a superintendent and holding her or him accountable for managing the district in conformity with the school board's policies and state laws (Carol et al., 1986; Goodman, Fulbright, & Zimmerman, 1997; IASB, 1996). Robert K. Wimpelberg (personal communication, April 27, 2001) asserts that "it is the board's hiring of, evaluation of, and support for the superintendent that matters the most in its potential to affect student learning." Numerous publications and services (e.g., recruitment, professional development/training) are available to assist school boards in their selection of, collaboration with, and evaluation of superintendents.

Nevertheless, critics contend that many school boards lack the training or capacity to develop productive, positive, and long-term relationships with superintendents, a position that is based in part on the high turnover of urban superintendents; in 1990-91, 20 of the 25 largest central city school districts had superintendent vacancies (Danzberger, 1992; Danzberger et al., 1992; The Twentieth Century Fund). According to Sharon Lewis of the Council of the Great City Schools, a non-profit organization representing the nation's largest public school

systems, a 1999 survey of their districts showed the average superintendent tenure to be 2 1/3 years and declining (personal communication, September 12, 2001). Case study and survey data indicate that negative board-superintendent working relationships are marked by an overload of information and work on the board, too much board involvement in administrative matters, lack of board independence from the superintendent, and haste on the part of the superintendent to resolve issues too quickly (Carol et al., 1986). In contrast, respect, trust, confidence, support, and open communication characterize good relationships between school boards and superintendents (Anderson, 1992; Carol et al., 1986). A 1988-90 study of more than 250 urban, suburban, and rural/small-town school boards from 16 states found that most school boards have weak procedures for management of board-superintendent conflict. A high percentage of school boards formally evaluate their superintendents, but such evaluations can be counterproductive when the school board and superintendent have not agreed in advance to clearly defined performance expectations and the assessment of results (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger et al., 1992; Robinson & Bickers, 1990).

The superintendent-school board relationship has been the subject of considerable discussion and concern. It is covered in more detail in the "Superintendents and School Board Relations" section of Thomas' (2001) literature review, the companion to this technical report.

Board Member Relations. School board members do not have authority to govern local education as individuals; states only authorize school boards to govern as a singular body (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992; IASB, 1996). Thus, the ability of board members to work together and reach consensus is essential for boards to exercise their authority. Traditionally, board members have conceptualized their role as trustees and functioned as one body representing the collective values and interests of the community (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992, 1994; Danzberger & Usdan, 1994; McGonagill, 1987; Merz, 1986). Hill and colleagues (1989) observed that in each of six urban school districts nominated and selected for their implementation of improvement plans, though not necessarily for improvement in academic achievement, the school board exhibited the ability to reach consensus and was not fractured by conflict.

Critics charge that since the 1960s, board members increasingly have viewed their role as representatives, rather than trustees, and operated as individuals representing specific groups of constituents, special interests, and/or single issues (Carol et al, 1986; Danzberger, 1992, 1994; Danzberger et al., 1987, 1992; Danzberger & Usdan, 1994; McCloud & McKenzie, 1994; McGonagill, 1987; Rallis & Criscoe, 1993; Schlechty & Cole, 1993; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992; Wagoner, 1992). Critics also have censured some school board members for concentrating on individual relationships with constituents to further their individual political careers (The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992; Wagner, 1992, Wilson, 1994). The representative role appears to impede the ability of board members to function as one body (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992, 1994, Danzberger et al., 1987, 1992; Danzberger & Usdan, 1994; McCloud & McKenzie, 1994; McGonagill, 1987; Rallis & Criscoe, 1993; Schlechty & Cole, 1993). Danzberger and colleagues (1992) write, "There is no question that

the school boards most visibly troubled and which are condemned for the most dysfunctional behaviors are those whose members' practice the mirror theory of representative government" (p. 94). A lack of consensus among board members regarding their appropriate role (e.g., representative versus trustee) also may cause frustration and conflict (Danzberger et al., 1992; Merz, 1986; McGonagill, 1987).

Several studies confirm that many school boards have difficulty working as a body. In one survey study, urban, suburban, and rural/small town school boards tended to rate themselves low on board member relations (Danzberger et al., 1992). More specifically, boards rated themselves low on interpersonal conflict resolution skills, respect and trust for the collective board, and communication among members. Urban boards rated themselves the lowest on average. According to Rallis and Criscoe (1993), a state government evaluation of Seattle schools (Washington State House of Representatives, 1990) found that individuality hampered many Seattle school boards. Case study research in nine metropolitan area districts revealed that school board members, educators, and the public perceived that the inability of the school board to work as a team and undue influence by special interest groups hindered the board's ability to govern effectively and created a poor image of board performance (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1994). School board members in the case study and board chairpersons in survey research expressed dissatisfaction that many board members do not understand their trusteeship role and are focused on single issues (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1994; Danzberger et al., 1987). In other studies, school board presidents, superintendents, and high school principals frequently recommended decreasing the influence of special interests to improve board effectiveness (Anderson, 1992), and school board members from three states reported that special interest groups were a source of frustration and conflict (Merz, 1986).

The shift away from the trusteeship role appears to be related to changes in election procedures and greater diversity among board members, particularly in urban districts (Bradley, 1992; Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992, 1994; McCloud & McKenzie, 1994; McGonagill, 1987; Schlechty & Cole, 1993; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992). As previously mentioned, in the 1970s, urban school boards began shifting from at-large to subdistrict elections in an effort to draw members who more closely represented different ethnic, cultural, and political groups than the White, middle class professionals who typically had predominated (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1994; Danzberger et al., 1987; Kirst, 1994). Boards with members from subdistricts have been observed to be the most politicized (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1994; Danzberger et al., 1987). Racial and ethnic minority board members may feel torn between serving their respective constituencies and working more generally to improve education for all students in the district (Carol et al., 1986; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992).

However, because the representation of diverse constituencies satisfies an important democratic principal, it may no longer be politically feasible for school boards to function solely as trustees (McGonagill, 1987). Thus, the challenge is to transcend individual interests

enough to reach consensus yet still respect and address these interests (Carol et al., 1986; McCloud & McKenzie, 1994; McGonagill, 1987). More research is needed in order to measure both the negative and positive effects that the shift of individual board members to the representative role has had on the boards' ability to govern and, more specifically, to improve students' academic achievement. Investigation of how the trustee and representative roles can be blended for effective governance would be beneficial. In addition, research is needed to substantiate claims that many board members are using their positions as political stepping stones and concentrating on their individual relationships with constituents to the detriment of the board's ability to function as one body (The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992; Wagner, 1992; Wilson, 1994).

Interagency Collaboration. Numerous educational governance experts have emphasized the importance of interagency collaboration between schools and other local organizations, most notably health and social service agencies (Boyd, 1996; Danzberger et al., 1992, 1993; Goodman et al., 1997; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Resnick, 1999; Shannon, 1994; Usdan, 1994; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992; Wagner, 1992). A major goal of the restructuring/systemic reform movement of the 1990s has been the provision of integrated, comprehensive social and educational services to children and families based on the conviction that unless children's needs outside school are adequately met, their academic achievement cannot improve (Boyd, 1996; Danzberger, 1992; Danzberger et al., 1992; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Resnick, 1999; Shannon, 1994; Usdan, 1994; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992). Greater attention to demographic factors, such as child poverty, growing racial and ethnic minority populations, and more working mothers, and social problems, such as drug use and homelessness, underlie the demand for collaboration (Danzberger, 1992; Danzberger et al., 1992; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Resnick, 1999; Shannon, 1994; Usdan, 1994; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992).

School boards and/or new integrated services boards have been called upon to lead and oversee interagency collaboration. The Twentieth Century Fund (1992) called for the establishment of state-mandated Children and Youth Coordinating Boards to link local social, health, and education services. The National School Boards Association (NSBA) made advocacy for social, health, and education services on behalf of children one of its four major leadership prongs (Campbell & Greene, 1994; Shannon, 1994). Shannon (1994), as executive director of the National School Boards Association, wrote that "if the comprehensive needs of all children are to be met, the schools are a natural place in which to deliver the services, and educators are natural partners for those responsible for providing the services. The NSBA unambiguously endorses this approach to serving all the needs of children" (p. 389).

Although the literature contains many and varied descriptions of collaboration between schools and health and social service agencies, research has not identified the best models for such collaboration or persuasively demonstrated that such collaboration improves students' academic achievement. Research suggests that while interagency linkages between social, health, and education services have benefitted some at-risk children, schools have been

somewhat uncooperative partners in these collaborative efforts (Boyd, 1996). In a 1988-90 survey of urban, suburban, and rural/small town school boards, members rated their boards low on coordination and policy formation with human service agencies (Danzberger et al., 1992). School boards may lack the capacity to collaborate with social and health service agencies, given their already expansive responsibilities (Danzberger, 1994; Kirst, 1994). Little attention has been directed to the potential costs versus benefits of such collaboration to school boards and districts. Furthermore, school boards' advocacy on behalf of children and families' health and social needs could raise contentious debate over the appropriate services to provide to children and families, given the range of values and beliefs regarding parental, personal, and government responsibilities and rights (Boyd, 1996).

Local and State Government. In contrast to the reformers of the early 1900s, many school board experts now advise boards to increase their linkages to local government (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992; Danzberger et al., 1992; Usdan, 1994). The premise that education traditionally was apolitical has been labeled a myth, and many believe that the potential benefits of closer affiliation with local government outweigh the possible dangers (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992; Danzberger et al., 1992; Usdan, 1994; Wirt & Kirst, 1992). Local support for education has declined, particularly in urban areas, as poverty has increased and the elderly population has grown (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger et al., 1992). As school boards have become more culturally, ethnically, racially, and politically diverse, their informal ties to the traditional community power structure have eroded (Carol et al., 1986). Establishment of linkages with local government could give boards more political clout and community support, as well as facilitate the coordination of education, health, and social services for children and families (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992; Danzberger et al., 1992; Usdan, 1994).

Research indicates that school boards do not routinely interact with local government unless they are fiscally dependent (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger et al., 1992). In a 1988-90 survey of urban, suburban, and rural/small town school boards, boards reported that they typically do not actively influence the local government's education-related policymaking (Danzberger et al., 1992). Scant research has examined the impact of closer alliances between school boards and local government on students' academic achievement. Mayoral takeovers offer examples of greater affiliation with local government. As detailed earlier, they have had mixed effects on academic achievement (ECS, 1999, 2001; Ziebarth, 1999). Carol and colleagues (1986) observed that boards that were fiscally dependent upon local government and, therefore, in close contact, often were mired in conflict. The advantages and disadvantages of affiliation of school boards with local government require further research in order to guide school boards to establish optimal arrangements that will positively affect achievement.

In addition to closer linkages to local government, some experts claim that school boards would benefit from greater collaboration with state government. Tension between school boards and states has escalated as states have exercised greater control over local

educational governance (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger et al., 1987, 1992; Johnson, 1988; Kirst, 1994). In the 1980s, 44 states passed extensive educational reforms, and the proportion of education funded by the states increased (Danzberger et al., 1992). Although local school boards are state-authorized government bodies, school boards and states have not collaborated in the development of educational reforms and legislation, and school boards have largely acquiesced to the states' involvement and not actively sought to resume the control they have lost (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger et al., 1987; Resnick, 1999). School boards, through state and national associations, could seek to become active partners in educational reform (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger et al., 1987; Resnick, 1999). Research should examine how the tension between states and local school boards has affected educational governance, assess the effect of collaboration on school boards' effectiveness, and identify barriers to, and facilitators of, school boards' collaboration with states (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger et al., 1987).

Public Relations. The school board, as a democratic institution, ideally represents and is responsive to the public through its membership and governance. Critics contend that lack of school board candidates, low voter turnout, limited public involvement, and poor understanding of the school board's role are primary evidence that the school board is a failing institution (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992; Danzberger et al., 1987; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1994; Rallis & Criscoe, 1993; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992). Data indicate that the public is dissatisfied with, and/or misunderstands, the role of school boards (Carol et al., 1986; NSBF, 1999). In a national opinion survey of urban residents and urban school board members, only 37% of the urban public reported that their local school board was performing a good to excellent job, whereas 70% of school board members rated their performance as good to excellent (NSBF, 1999). Only 39% of the public stated that the school board should be one of the groups or individuals that creates most of the policies related to the operation of local schools (NSBF, 1999). Improved public relations, including relations with prominent business leaders who may provide funding and opportunities for special programs such as experiential learning, may be necessary to ensure public support and institutional survival (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992).

School board authorities urge boards to increase their communication with and inclusion of the public and to establish specific policies for public relations (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger et al., 1992, 1993; IASB, 1996; Nelson & Crum, 1983; NSBF, 1999; Resnick, 1999). However, greater inclusion is a simplistic recommendation. Ogawa (1996) writes that effective organizations construct both bridges and buffers to external groups. Greater inclusion of the public in all aspects of governance likely would not be beneficial nor desired (Boyd, 1996; Ogawa, 1996). While the public appears to desire greater involvement in education and communication with the school board, it may prefer means other than voting or attendance at school board meetings (Carol et al., 1986; NSBF, 1999). Boards may also need to implement specific public relations policies, including policies for communicating with the media. A 1988-90 survey of urban, suburban, and rural/small town school boards found that many boards lacked comprehensive written media policies (Danzberger et al., 1992). Criticism of

the board in the media, particularly by board members, can negatively impact the public's perception of the board's effectiveness (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992).

Studies should examine the variety of policies and procedures that boards use to involve and communicate with the public. The association of these policies and procedures to public perceptions and support of the school board, as well as their relation to the quality of educational governance and, more specifically, students' academic achievement, should be assessed. A study of six urban school districts, nominated and selected based on their implementation of improvement reforms, found that these successful districts were characterized by the school board and other key players' involvement of and communication with the community in educational issues and reform goals, providing some evidence of the importance of good public relations (Hill, Wise, & Shapiro, 1989).

Effective Performance

Policymaking. Policymaking is widely described as being the school board's principal function (Nelson & Crum, 1983; Carver, 1997; Clemmer, 1991; Danzberger et al., 1992, 1993; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992). Guidelines for the formulation and oversight of policy, such as Clemmer's (1991) book, *The School Policy Handbook: A Primer for Administrators and School Board Members*, are readily available. In addition, state boards of education and the National School Boards Association offer a variety of materials, training opportunities, and services to assist school board members with policymaking (Nelson & Crum, 1983). According to experts, good policies generally contain the following elements: reflection of the board's vision for the school system, coherence with other policies, specification of goals and objectives, definition of roles and responsibilities, flexibility for the operation of the policy, specification of outcomes to measure success, and compliance with state and federal mandates (Danzberger et al., 1992; Resnick, 1999). Furthermore, it is recommended that school boards have a written policy about making policy, including specification of the processes, procedures, and resources for information gathering, development, oversight, and evaluation (Carol et al., 1986).

Many school boards appear to have room for improvement in their policymaking. Survey data suggest that many board members would like to improve their policymaking but are precluded from doing so by insufficient time, confusion over the distinction between policy and administration, and increasingly restrictive, externally imposed policies and laws (Carol et al., 1986). Approximately half of the 216 board chairpersons in one survey reported that more policy study and review sessions would improve policy making, and nearly a third of the boards represented in the study did not hold periodic goal-setting and planning meetings (Carol et al., 1986). Case study data from nine metropolitan districts revealed that many of these boards lacked procedures for policy oversight and evaluation (Carol et al., 1986). A national review of policy manuals in 130 school districts revealed wide variation in the inclusion of policy items deemed essential by study directors of the regional offices of the U.S.

Department of Education (Nelson & Crum, 1983). In addition, many school boards in the national review recorded their policies in multiple locations without a central policy manual consolidating all policies or documenting their whereabouts. As mentioned previously, two studies of school board meeting minutes indicated that only a small percentage of board decisions are focused on policy (Hange & Leary, 1991; Van Alfen & Schmidt, 1997).

Though the literature abounds with recommendations and guidelines for good policymaking, there are few studies that link school boards' policymaking to students' academic outcomes. Those that do exist are difficult to find in the research literature because they focus on the policy, such as the prohibition of social promotion, and include limited details about the school board's role in the formulation, oversight, evaluation, and success or failure of the policy. Nevertheless, as discussed in the "Students' Academic Achievement" section above, school board associations urge boards to focus more intensively on policies aimed directly at improving student achievement. Thus, achievement-targeted policy making is a ripe topic for research, which is needed not only to substantiate the relation between policy making and academic achievement but also to identify the crucial elements of this policymaking.

Leadership. Each of the other key characteristics delineated here can be incorporated into a definition of effective leadership. Yet, some educational governance experts would consider this definition notably incomplete. According to many experts, the creation of a vision, or mission, for education and empowerment of the administration, educators, and community to carry out the vision also are critical elements of effective leadership (Campbell & Greene, 1994; Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger et al., 1992, 1993; Griswold, 1997; Johnson, 1988; Rallis & Criscoe, 1993; Resnick, 1999; Schlechty, 1992; Van Alfen, 1992). Establishing the vision for education is the first of four leadership thrusts advocated by the National School Boards Association (Campbell & Greene, 1994; Resnick, 1999; Shannon, 1994). Ideally, the school board exercises its core democratic function by assessing community values and interests and translating these into a vision for education that falls within the parameters set by the state and federal governments (Campbell & Greene, 1994; Carol et al., 1986; Griswold, 1997; Resnick, 1999; Schlechty, 1992). Mobilization of the community, including school personnel, political and business leaders, and the general public, may be facilitated by giving the community a voice in the formulation of the vision and a role in its attainment, accurately matching the vision to community values and interests, and using the vision as a template for short- and long-term strategic planning and evaluation (Danzberger et al., 1992; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Resnick, 1999; Van Alfen, 1992).

Although the school board literature contains anecdotal examples of boards that have successfully established a vision and empowered their communities, these functions and the steps required to accomplish them have not been well explicated and there is a lack of consensus among experts regarding what they entail. According to Van Alfen (1992), for example, leadership is more an outlook or viewpoint than a group of specific techniques. As part of a two-year project headed by the California School Boards Association [CSBA], a

committee of school board experts formulated a more detailed definition, including specific responsibilities and functions, of the establishment of a long-term vision, as follows:

> Of all the roles and responsibilities of school boards, none is more central to the purpose of local governance than ensuring that a long-term vision is established for the school system. The vision statement reflects the consensus of the governance team (the entire board and superintendent) on what children need in order to achieve their highest potential and which educational programs will be offered to reach that ideal. The vision reflects the shared values of the community and the governance team and as such should drive virtually every aspect of the district's program. (Campbell & Greene, 1994, p. 393)

The committee also defined the creation of a climate for excellence as a component of the vision role as follows:

> Providing direction for the district also includes a more subtle, but nonetheless real, board function—creating a climate that makes possible the achievement of excellence in the system. Much of what the board does to establish a climate for excellence emanates from the tone it sets individually and collectively. By setting fair but rigorous standards of performance, establishing well-considered policies, and treating its own members and others with dignity and respect, the board communicates a professionalism at the top that becomes a model for the entire school system. (Campbell & Greene, 1994, p. 393)

In contrast to the CSBA's recommendation of mobilization via example, Resnick (1999) recommends the empowerment of administrators and educators through transference of decision-making responsibilities but warns that this potentially will confuse the lines of authority, responsibility, and accountability.

As discussed earlier, there is a common perception in the educational governance and school board literatures that school boards are not effective leaders for the 21st century. A criticism frequently aimed at school boards is that they are reactive, rather than proactive (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger et al., 1987; Danzberger, 1994; NSBF, 1999; Rallis & Criscoe, 1993). Another criticism is that school boards frequently rubber-stamp policy initiatives presented to them by the administration, following rather than leading (Feistritzer, 1989; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992). The increase in state involvement in local educational governance in the 1980s strongly suggests that the states perceived school boards as ineffective in setting the vision for and moving the district toward educational reform (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1994; Danzberger et al., 1987, 1992; Johnson, 1988; Kirst, 1994). To date, there is mixed research evidence that school boards have the ability to and can effectively lead major reform efforts (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger & Clark, 1993, cited in Danzberger 1994; Danzberger et al., 1992; Firestone, Fuhrman, & Kirst, 1989; Keedy, 1997; McAdams, 2000; Westat, 2001). Additional research is needed not only to substantiate the importance of vision and empowerment for effective governance and improvement of students' academic achievement but also to identify the critical components of vision and empowerment to enable school boards to lead more effectively.

Budgeting. School boards have traditionally focused on financial oversight (Resnick, 1999). In addition to planning and approving of district budgets, the school boards' financial responsibilities often entail negotiations with labor unions; oversight of service contracts for transportation, food, technology, and facilities maintenance; and revenue generation via capital campaigns, bonds, and tax levies. One of the school board' s principal budget responsibilities is to secure adequate funding to support academic achievement. Strong, yet disputed, data demonstrate that school funding is inversely related to students' academic achievement (Burtless, 1996; Greenwald, Hedges, & Laine, 1996; Payne & Biddle, 1999; Verstegen & King, 1998). Money, however, does not guarantee academic success, as studies finding little or no relation between funding and student achievement attest; money must be devoted to effective policies and programs. School boards need to identify and fund effective policies and programs and cull those that are ineffective from their budgets, instead of continually adding new policies and programs and seeking increasingly more money (Picus, 2001). To make informed financial decisions, school board members must collaborate with school financial officers and develop sufficient knowledge of and facility with budget figures (Williams, 1998). An examination of three school districts that experienced bankruptcy revealed previous years of overspending, overestimation of resources, failure to plan ahead, failure to heed audits, insufficient cost control procedures, inability to track spending, and failure to keep hiring and raises within budget (Noonan, Manca, & Matranga, 1999). These conditions are logical harbingers of financial insolvency (Noonan et al., 1999).

A critical task for school boards is the allocation of financial resources to bolster academic achievement, a task that has garnered attention as the demand for high standards and accountability has swept the nation. In a 1997-98 national survey, student achievement supplanted finance and budget issues as school board members' top concern (ASBJ, 1998). Odden and Archibald's (2001) review of research and examination of two districts and an additional 12 schools that reapportioned resources and demonstrated improvement in student achievement revealed that successful schools directed funds toward costly strategies, such as smaller class size, professional development and more planning time for teachers, and one-to-one tutoring for struggling students. Each school selected an overall curriculum strategy, such as a national school reform design. Data-rich needs assessments dictated strategy selection, and schools had flexibility to reapportion their funding to finance the strategy. One of the major shifts that schools made was from financial support of categorical programs to the support of a whole-school educational strategy. Many schools also reassigned or eliminated instructional support aides. Recently, Standard and Poor's developed and released an independent evaluation system, School Evaluation Services (SES), that assesses, based on a combination of financial and academic indicators, district performance and produces data that school boards can use to guide the reallocation of funds to improve achievement (Cox & Stewart, 2001).

Adequate Evaluation and Preparation

Evaluation. School board authorities frequently recommend that school boards engage in evaluations for three primary reasons: to guide the board's activities; to hold staff, individual schools, and the district accountable; and to hold themselves accountable for their own and the districts' performance (Amundson & Richardson, 1991; Boone, 1991; Capital Area School Development Association, 1990; Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger et al., 1992, 1993; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Resnick, 1999; Robinson & Bickers, 1990). The first reason is the one most often advanced (Boone, 1991; Carol et al., 1986). In this context, evaluation serves an oversight function and is part of a cyclical process in which goals are set, policies implemented, and structures and resources provided. Then evaluation is conducted to determine success and direct the resetting of goals. Thus, evaluation can serve as a control mechanism and be used to optimize the school board's and the district's performance (Boone, 1991; Capital Area School Development Association, 1990; Carol et al., 1986; Robinson & Bickers, 1990). The other two reasons supporting school board evaluation have gained prominence as the demand for accountability has swept the country. The National School Boards Association lists accountability as one of its four leadership prongs, but school boards may be more likely to interpret this to mean that they should hold others accountable rather than themselves (Campbell & Greene, 1994; Resnick, 1999; Shannon, 1994). Because board members are elected or appointed, they may feel that they are evaluated sufficiently through the selection process (Boone, 1991; Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger et al., 1987; Robinson & Bickers, 1990; Sewall, 1996). However, as the need for and role of school boards are increasingly questioned, boards may need to evaluate themselves with regard to their district's performance and prove their effectiveness to protect themselves from attacks (Amundson & Richardson, 1991; Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger et al., 1987; Sewall, 1996). In addition, forthright communication of self-evaluation findings can build trust with administrators, teachers and other staff, and the public, and could also make these groups more receptive to working toward common goals (Carol et al., 1986; Gates & Wall, 1986; McGonagill, 1987; Resnick, 1999).

Despite calls for evaluation, studies conducted in the 1980s and 1990s indicate that many boards do not evaluate themselves regularly. In a survey of 216 school board chairpersons, only about one third reported that their boards regularly conduct evaluations (Carol et al., 1986). In a national survey of more than 700 randomly-sampled superintendents, only about a quarter reported that their boards evaluate themselves regularly. In nearly all cases, the evaluation was annual. Slightly more than half of the respondents reported that they never evaluated themselves (Robinson & Bickers, 1990). Of those boards engaging in evaluation, 59% used criteria established by both the board and the superintendent, 24% used criteria set only by the board, and the remainder used standards set by the state or other agencies.

Several additional findings related to school boards' evaluation suggest that current recommendations and practices may be inadequate. Robinson and Bickers (1990) assessed the criteria most commonly identified in the literature as important for school board evaluation. These included a wide range of school board responsibilities, from conducting meetings as scheduled at a time and place convenient for the public to providing orientation and continued development for board members. Only two criteria were specifically related to students' academic achievement: setting short- and long-term goals for academic progress and staying informed of that progress. Greater attention to the evaluation of policies and actions directly related to academic achievement may be critical for boards' success. In addition, survey results from a random sample of more than 1,000 superintendents show that school boards frequently use three evaluation techniques: performance checklists/rating scales (69.6%), discussions among board members (63.5%), and written comments (44.2%) (Robinson & Bickers, 1990). Urban school boards prefer discussions more than other school boards; however, the relative effectiveness of each of these evaluation techniques is not known (Robinson & Bickers, 1990). Most experts recommend evaluation of the board as a whole, which is most common, but some advocate evaluation of individual members, and some support the evaluation of meetings (Boone, 1991; Robinson & Bickers, 1990). Many experts also recommend that administrators, educators, and the public within the district have a voice in the board's evaluation (Capital Area School Development Association, 1990; Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger et al., 1992; McGonagill, 1987; Robinson & Bickers, 1990). Research, however, indicates that few boards have and use an established method for such input (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger et al., 1992; Robinson & Bickers, 1990). Many experts recommend use of an outside auditor for evaluation, usually with, or addition to, evaluation by the board itself, but this appears to be an infrequent practice (Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Robinson & Bickers, 1990; Streshly & Frase, 1993; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992). Furthermore, some experts argue that school boards would more candidly evaluate themselves and concentrate on development if evaluations were exempt from sunshine laws (Goodman et al., 1997; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000).

The literature contains only limited evidence that school board evaluations improve governance effectiveness and student outcomes (Robinson & Bickers, 1990). Goodman and colleagues (1997) found that evaluation was one of several characteristics comprising good governance that appeared related to greater academic achievement. Carol and colleagues (1986) found that evaluation, together with several other traits, characterized school boards that seemed to have a greater sense of effectiveness. However, studies such as these provide only weak evidence of the importance of evaluation for effective governance and students' academic achievement. Research is needed to examine linkages between these variables and identify the critical elements of evaluation for effective governance and improving and sustaining students' academic achievement.

Training/Development. There is widespread consensus among school board experts that board members should obtain training/development to improve their individual and board effectiveness (Capital Area School Development Association, 1990; Carol et al., 1986;

Danzberger et al., 1992, 1993; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; IASB, 1996; Kansas City Consensus, 2001; Schmidt, 1992). The literature is populated with calls for training/development for virtually every role of the school board. Many board members concur that training/development is needed (Anderson, 1992; Carol et al., 1986; Tallerico, 1991) and many states and school board associations have mandated that school board members obtain training/development (Capital Area School Development Association, 1990; Danzberger et al., 1992; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Resnick, 1999; Schmidt, 1992; Tallerico, 1991).

Abundant training/development opportunities and materials are available. Board member candidates can receive preliminary training/development, new members usually receive orientations, and experienced members may engage in ongoing training/development (Capital Area School Development Association, 1990). There is much less agreement, however, over the form, content, and length of training/development that board members should receive, who should provide it, whether it should be required, and whether it actually enhances governance effectiveness (Schmidt, 1992). The Capital Area School Development Association (1990) listed the following resources for training/development: students; parents and community members; fellow board members; self-assessment reports; policy manuals; educational reports and position papers; legislators and school law; local, state, and national training programs; and district staff. Independent groups, such as the Institute for Educational Leadership and The Danforth Program for School Board Members, also provide training/development. Superintendents frequently take responsibility for providing orientations to new school board members (Carol et al., 1986), and may tend to view themselves as the primary source for ongoing training/development (Tallerico, 1991). While some research supports a primary role for superintendents in ongoing training/development, other research shows that school board members prefer and rely more upon self-initiated and self-directed learning in the form of on-the-job training, reflection, learning from mistakes, information gathering, and independent reading (Tallerico, 1991; Thomas, 1993). When training/development is mandated, state departments of education and state board associations usually provide it (Schmidt, 1992). State boards associations typically offer a range of training/development materials and opportunities, including pamphlets, guidebooks, tapes, journals, newsletters, policy briefs, retreats, and workshops.

Critics of formal training/development programs have charged that they are often too superficial, too concerned with dispensing information rather than building skills, and too focused on individuals rather than the board as one body or the board and superintendent as a team (Carol et al., 1986; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Schmidt, 1992). School board members themselves may prioritize the need for information above skill and team development (Carol et al., 1986; Thomas, 1993). After becoming members, many are surprised by the complexity of the job and, thus, may feel their most pressing need is for information (Anderson, 1992; Carol et al., 1986). Thomas (1993), for instance, found a need for greater knowledge of the intent of, and factors precipitating, states' reform legislation among school board members in the central region states. However, given that frequent criticisms of school

boards center on the inability of members to function collectively and in collaboration with their superintendent, team training/development may warrant a higher priority than school boards usually give it (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger et al., 1987; Goodman et al., 1997; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Schmidt, 1992).

Experts disagree over whether training should be required (Capital Area School Development Association, 1990; Danzberger et al., 1992; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Resnick, 1999; Schmidt, 1992; Tallerico, 1991). According to Tallerico (1991), "Such approaches can be criticized for giving less attention to shaping the content and processes of learning to be consistent with trustees' needs/perspectives, than to devising accountability systems for measuring and recording hours of formal instruction" (p. 104). School board members have cited lack of time as a reason why they have not sought training/development on their own (Carol et al., 1986; Resnick, 1999). While mandating training/development may surmount this barrier, it also may discourage qualified candidates who view the requirement as excessive from seeking election or agreeing to appointment to the school board (Capital Area School Development Association, 1990). State-mandated training may signify further erosion of local control (Capital Area School Development Association, 1990). Nevertheless, Goodman and Zimmerman (2000) report that several states have mandated yearly instruction to school board-superintendent teams. They state that this instruction has yielded "enormously positive" (p. 14) results for school board members but do not include data to support this conclusion.

Despite the frequent and urgent calls and requirements for training/development, there is little data to prove the effectiveness of the various training/development materials and activities (Schmidt, 1992). Research is needed to help boards and board members discern which of the plethora of training/development materials and opportunities are likely to be most useful, particularly given their limited time and finances (Tallerico, 1991). In addition, the components of effective training/development materials and activities should be identified. For instance, while one-shot formal training/development activities appear more common than multiple-dose activities delivered over time, multiple-dose activities may prove superior (Carol et al., 1986). Effectiveness data additionally could help school boards justify the financial and time costs of training/development to their communities and themselves.

Conclusion

School board experts have identified an assortment of characteristics that they consider critical for effective school board governance. Among the most frequently identified are: appropriate overarching foci, namely students' academic achievement and policy, not administration; good relations with the superintendent, other agencies, local and state governments, and the public, as well as among board members; effective performance in the areas of policymaking, leadership, and budgeting; adequate evaluation and preparation, entailing engagement in self-evaluation; evaluation of student, school, and district outcomes; and training/development.

However, solid research linking these characteristics to more effective governance and, more specifically, positive academic outcomes is notably absent in the literature.

In 1986, Carol and colleagues wrote, "Some descriptive accounts of the work of boards and superintendents can be found in the literature, but there is no recent solid data base upon which to generate recommendations for change in either this relationship or the role, functions and operating structures of boards themselves" (p. 2). To rectify this situation, Carol and colleagues (1986) conducted case study and survey research on school boards; their findings from their research are cited frequently within this report and throughout the school board literature. Unfortunately, a proliferation of school board research did not ensue after the publication of their work, and there are virtually no studies in which governance variables are clearly defined, measured, and their impact on governance effectiveness and, more specifically, students' academic performance quantitatively assessed. Two qualitatively-oriented studies, namely Goodman and Zimmerman (1997) and IASB (2000), have established a clearer link between school boards and students' academic achievement, but these are not sufficient for a solid contemporary research base. In an attempt to advance the study of local school board effectiveness, problems and directions for future research are discussed next.

Research Limitations and Future Directions

The future control of school boards over local education could depend on research that identifies key characteristics of effective school boards and clearly links these characteristics to students' academic achievement. This section examines limitations in school board research over the past two decades, including the lack of rigorous data, the failure to operationalize variables, and the failure to examine school boards as a discrete unit of analysis. Then, future directions for research on school board effectiveness are discussed, a model for the study of school board effectiveness is proposed, and an assortment of studies is recommended.

Limitations

The school board literature is rife with conclusions and recommendations based on personal experience, observations, and opinions. School board experts frequently rely on anecdotal evidence, rather than data from carefully designed research studies, to support their conclusions. An exception to this practice is Carol and colleagues' (1986) case study and survey research, which is well cited in the school board literature and this report. This study took place before the restructuring/systemic reform movement assumed full force, however. Changes resulting from this reform movement have affected school boards; therefore, more contemporary studies are needed. Danzberger and colleagues (1992), Goodman and colleagues (1997), the IASB (2000), and several other researchers provide additional, much needed data on school board effectiveness. Yet, the extant studies do not constitute a strong research base. Many more studies are needed, including research conducted by individuals who are not

affiliated with organizations that offer training/development programs for school boards. While integration of research and practice has advantages—for instance, it provides opportunities to refine research-based recommendations through attempts to implement them—practice can bias research.

Another problem with the school board literature is that authors sometimes report that their conclusions are based on a combination of research, personal experience, and review of the literature without clarifying the specific source of each conclusion or fully describing their research methods. For example, Rallis & Criscoe (1993) report that they derived their data from personal experience, a literature review, a case study of a rural county board, and a questionnaire of individual board members, but they do not link all conclusions to the specific data source and do not detail their research methods. Given the paucity of rigorous data on school board effectiveness, and the dwarfing of this data by personal experiences and opinions, it is critical that those reporting data-based findings distinguish among their different sources of information and carefully describe the basis of their conclusions.

The failure to operationalize variables poses another methodological problem that must be overcome in order for research to advance. Surprisingly, the school board literature contains few examples of operational definitions of school board effectiveness. Instead, the characteristics of effective school boards usually are described in general terms, and often these descriptions focus more on what school boards should *not* do, rather than what they should do, thereby providing incomplete information regarding optimal activities (Campbell & Greene, 1994). Danzberger and colleagues (1992) make the following attempt to operationalize effectiveness: "The measure of effective governance is the collective ability of board members to fulfill their obligations and responsibilities across the spectrum of responsible governing behaviors" (p. 82). School board experts, however, have not reached consensus regarding the spectrum of responsible governing behaviors or the obligations and responsibilities required and their relative importance for effective governance. Furthermore, the obligations and responsibilities themselves need to be operationalized, as discussed above with respect to each characteristic delineated in the "Key Characteristics of Effective School Boards" section. Reliable and valid measures of specific characteristics need to be developed in order for researchers to make accurate conclusions and comparisons across studies.

Operationalization of students' academic achievement is more straightforward. Standardized achievement test scores are the most readily available and comparable across locales. However, researchers should not rely exclusively on standardized test scores as these do not provide a full picture of students' academic performance. For instance, the school board's adoption of stricter promotion standards could result in a higher dropout rate for low-achieving students and spuriously elevate achievement test scores by removing many of the lowest scoring students from the calculation. Other potentially useful measures of students' academic performance include: absence, retention, dropout, promotion, graduation, and college matriculation rates, as well as student grades, enrollment in advanced placement courses, honor roll attainment, and scholarship awards (Amundson & Richardson, 1991;

Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Resnick, 1999). Other student outcomes, such as delinquency, community involvement, and employment, also might warrant inclusion in studies of school board effectiveness.

Another hindrance to the development of a solid research base on school board effectiveness is the failure of studies of educational governance to treat school boards as a discrete unit of analysis. Often, researchers and educational governance experts lump school boards into analysis and discussion of district leadership and do not consider school boards in their own right, or they address school boards only in terms of the board's relationship with the superintendent and other district personnel. In many studies, it is difficult to tease apart the direct and indirect effects of school boards on students' academic achievement from the effects of other individuals and groups, such as the superintendent. McAdam's (2000) case study of school board and district leadership in Houston, where standardized test scores have notably improved, is somewhat of an exception; it details the activities of the school board and board members, and additionally describes the activities of the superintendent, district personnel, community groups, and others, during the period in which test scores rose. However, while it seems apparent that the school board played a critical role in the turnaround, it is difficult to isolate the key activities and effects of the school board from those of other parties. Future directions for school board research in which the school board is a discrete unit of analysis are addressed in the next section.

Future Directions

The construction of models could augment understanding of school board effectiveness and guide future research by facilitating the creation and testing of general propositions. Figure 1 presents a simple model of the school board within the educational governance system. The model depicts the influence of the federal government, state and local government, and the court system on the school board, as described earlier in the report. It shows that selection procedures may impact school boards, as discussed earlier. It also illustrates how the school board—through an appropriate focus on students' academic achievement and policy; good relations with the superintendent, community agencies, state and local government, and the public, as well as among board members; effective performance in the areas of policymaking, leadership, and budgeting; and adequate evaluation and training/development—could affect the district, which in turn could impact schools, which could then affect students' achievement. For instance, the federal and state governments could offer money to school districts contingent upon the adoption of educational standards and thereby influence the school board to formulate policies in which the standards are embedded. The superintendent might then make programs available to help schools meet the standards and require schools to implement the programs. These programs could improve students' academic achievement as measured by their performance on standardized tests.

Figure 1. Simple Model to Guide School Board Research.

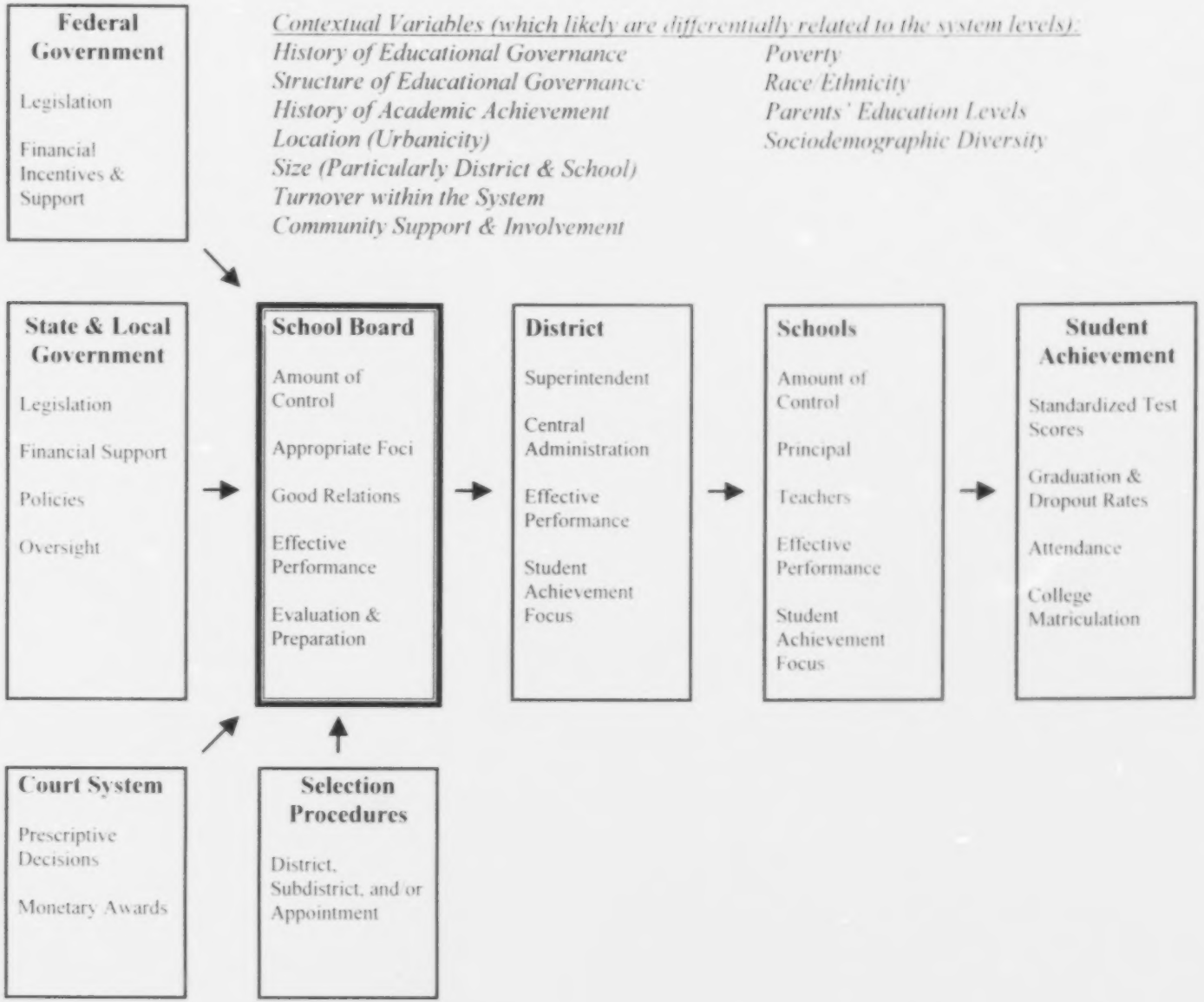
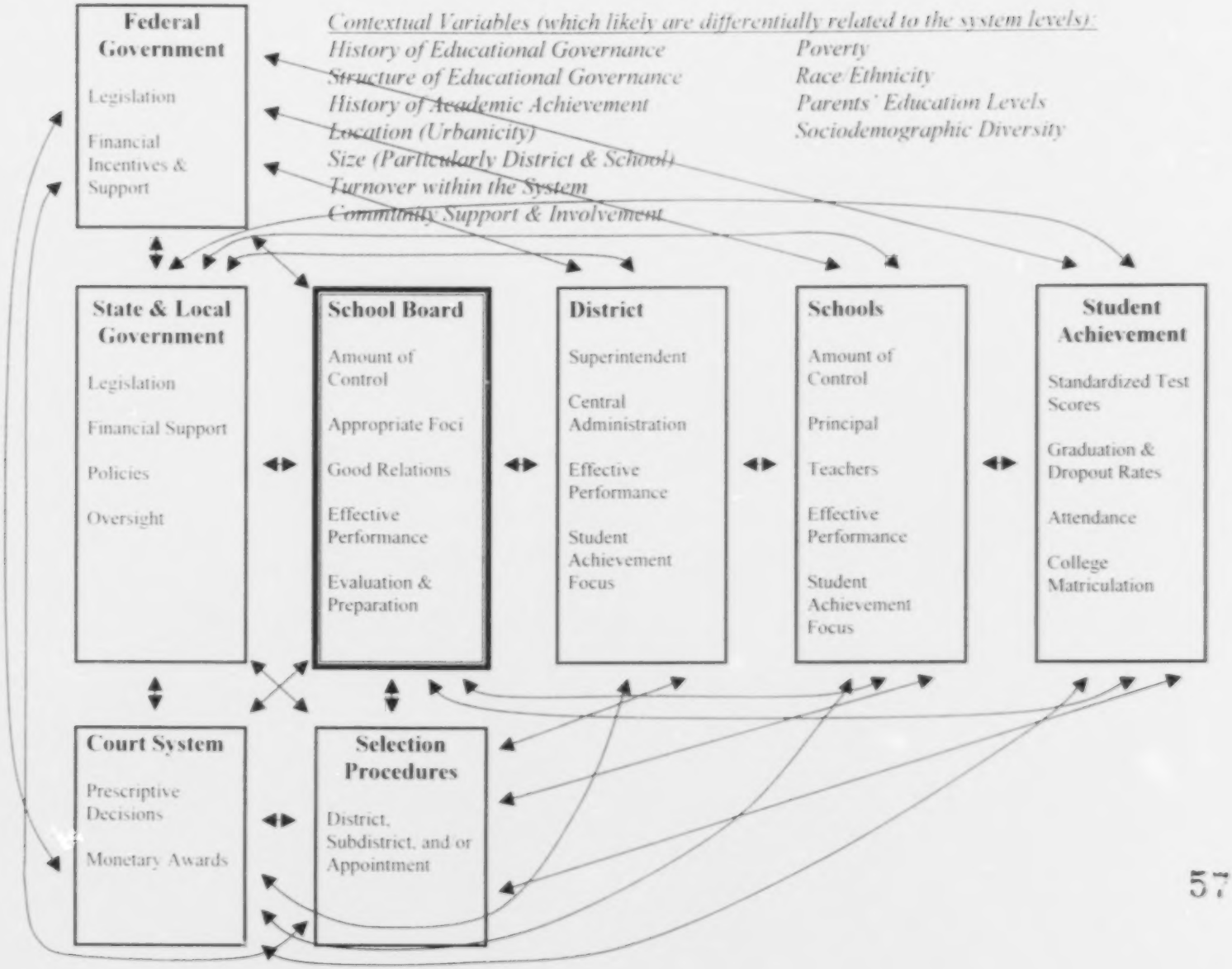


Figure 2. A Complex, Likely More Realistic Model to Guide School Board Research.



However, the direct and indirect effects on and by the school board within the educational governance system are much more complex than depicted in Figure 1. Figure 2 better represents the likely numerous and bidirectional relations among elements of the system. Fullan (1999) argues that the school system is complex, resistant to change, and thus multiple influences from the top down and the bottom up must be in operation for change to occur. For example, low test scores could influence the federal government to alter its guidelines for educational standards as well as cause the school board to change its focus on academic achievement, for instance, through approval of new whole-school reforms designed to improve standardized test scores. Schools whose students fail to demonstrate acceptable levels of academic achievement may be taken over by the state, eliminating or greatly reducing the school board's and district's control of the schools and causing school-level changes as well, such as the replacement of school personnel. State legislation giving schools site-based control over personnel, budgeting, and other responsibilities and assumption by the schools of these responsibilities necessarily would circumscribe the amount of control the school board and district have.

Although the models presented in Figures 1 and 2 are based on a review of the school board literature, they provide only a preliminary step in model development and are offered only as examples of what models supported by future data might entail. One purpose of the models is to propose and test general propositions, but a "single, one-size-fits-all arrangement" for educational governance is not likely to be found, given the diversity among districts across the nation (IEL, 2001, p. iv). Researchers must examine what works under which circumstances and for whom. For this reason, contextual variables are listed with the models, though not modeled due to their complexity and the small amount of research on their impact on school boards specifically. Locality is a leading candidate for a critical contextual variable. Although urban school boards are the least, more literature is devoted to them than to suburban or rural school boards, perhaps because urban school boards appear to have more severe and some unique problems (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger et al., 1992; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1994; Kirst, 1994). Indeed, some school board authorities have cautioned that traditional school board and educational governance is being abandoned due primarily to problems in urban areas (Danzberger, 1992; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1994; Shanker, 1989). Research indicates that traditional school board and educational governance continues to function well in communities with a homogeneous population, few financial difficulties, and agreement regarding educational goals (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992). School board and educational governance authorities also have emphasized that stability in leadership (i.e., low turnover) is necessary for effective governance and that reform piled on reform can be detrimental (Cuban, 1990; Danzberger, 1994; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Harrington-Lueker, 1996; Littleford, 1999; Kansas City Consensus, 2001; Shanker, 1989). The contextual variables listed in Figures 1 and 2 are not exhaustive, and their relative importance has not been determined. Researchers need to begin routinely incorporating contextual variables, such as those listed in the models, into their studies of school board effectiveness.

The sheer complexity of influences on and effects of school boards, an indication of which is provided in Figure 2, probably accounts in large part for the absence of quantitative studies of school board effectiveness. However, with the development and evolution of credible measures of students' academic achievement (e.g., NRTs & CRTs), computers that can quickly process large data sets, and statistical techniques (e.g., ANCOVA, hierarchical linear modeling) to analyze multi-level data, such analyses are possible. Just as the evolution of NRTs and ANCOVA significantly advanced the study of teacher effectiveness, today's technology can be used to further the study of school board effectiveness (S. Stringfield, personal communication, August 27, 2001).

Hofman's (1995) study of school boards in the Netherlands provides one example of the type of quantitative research that is needed in the United States. Hofman surveyed a random sample of 133 Dutch school boards and collected students' tests scores at one primary school within each board's jurisdiction. After accounting for a variety of student and school characteristics, Hofman found that increases in arithmetic and language achievement were positively associated with the boards' inclusion of school personnel and parents in their decision-making process. Hofman interprets this as support for greater site-based management of schools, but inclusion of input from school personnel and parents is not necessarily equivalent to site-based management. Hofman does not provide detailed information on the variables she measures; it is not clear what involvement of school personnel and parents in the school board's decision-making process entails. Furthermore, the system of educational governance in the Netherlands differs from that in the United States. Hofman's findings may not replicate here and thus were not described in the body of the report. Nevertheless, the strengths of the study, which include the random selection of school boards, operationalization of variables, and analysis of the association of school board governance variables to students' academic achievement, justify its identification as a model quantitative study for school board research in the U.S. Hofman (1995) additionally investigated the educational governance structure in her study by comparing private to public schools. Though not fully illustrated in Figures 1 and 2, studies in the U.S. similarly need to examine school board governance within the larger context of educational governance and with particular attention to educational governance reforms. Many educational governance reforms do not prescribe a clear role for school boards, and it is not clear how they will fare in these situations.

Another benefit of models such as those depicted in Figures 1 and 2 is that they encourage researchers to parcel off a subset of variables for careful examination while remaining mindful of the greater context in which their work fits. Despite advances in technology, few researchers have access to the full range of data necessary to conduct studies that include the large number of variables that have been identified in the school board literature as likely to influence or be influenced by school boards. Furthermore, large-scale quantitative studies would not suffice; the complexity of school board and educational governance precludes the ability of a single methodology to capture all relevant information. Future studies of school board governance should employ a variety of research methodologies.

Danzberger and colleagues (1987) recommend use of in-depth interviews and observations and less reliance on survey measures. Similarly, Tallerico (1991) states that surveys of school board members provide only limited information. However, surveys may yield inadequate data because reliable and valid survey measures have not yet been developed. Comparative case studies seem well suited for school board and educational governance research. The 2001 AERA symposium on mayoral takeovers (Cibulka, 2001; Honig, 2001; Kirst & Bulkley, 2001; Shipps, 2001) provides an example of the utility of comparative case studies. Just as there likely is no one best form of educational governance (IEL, 2001), there is no one best methodology for research on school board effectiveness, particularly at this point when there is still much to learn.

Conclusion

The current research literature on school boards has significant limitations. The foremost problem is that few quantitative or qualitative data-rich studies exist. In addition, researchers frequently fail to operationalize variables, and reliable and valid measures have not been developed. Without a rigorous body of qualitative and quantitative research that identifies the characteristics that are necessary for effective school board governance and substantiates that school boards affect students' academic achievement, boards will remain in jeopardy of losing further control over local education and face possible elimination. Future research must examine what form of school board and educational governance works under which circumstances and for whom. Changes in school board and educational governance are likely to be attempted with increasing frequency in communities across the nation, particularly in urban areas where students' academic achievement is low. Data to guide these changes is urgently needed.

SUMMARY

In the past two decades, many school board and educational governance reforms have been proposed and implemented. This trend shows no signs of abating. Many school board critics perceive boards to be obstacles to educational reforms designed to improve students' performance. Some critics have advocated that school boards be eliminated (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Danzberger et al., 1987; Danzberger, 1992, 1994; Finn, 1991; Harp, 1992; Harrington-Lueker, 1996; Johnson, 1988; Kirst, 1994; Olson, 1992; Streshly & Frase, 1993; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992; Whitson, 1998). In addition, states have expanded their involvement in local public education, passing increasingly prescriptive legislation (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992; Danzberger et al., 1987, 1992; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Hadderman, 1988; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1994; Johnson, 1988; Kirst, 1994; Olson & Bradley, 1992; Reid, 2000; Resnick, 1999; Todras, 1993). Danzberger and colleagues (1992, p. 27)

state. "School boards have been the biggest loser in the power shifts of the past 30 years." This is especially true in urban areas where state and mayoral takeovers are more likely to occur.

Some school board experts support experimentation with school board and educational governance reforms while others decry it, and some call for thoughtful consideration of and dialog regarding reform options. Few, however, demand additional research on school board effectiveness generally or within the context of specific reforms (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992, 1994; Danzberger et al., 1992, 1993; Harrington-Lueker, 1996; Resnick, 1999; Shanker, 1989; The Twentieth Century Fund, 1992). School board proponents have argued that effective school boards focus on students' academic achievement and policy rather than administration; have good relations with the superintendent, other community agencies, state and local government, and the public, as well as among the board members themselves; effectively practice policymaking, leadership, and budgeting; engage in self-evaluation and the evaluation of students, individual schools, and the district; and undertake training and development. However, research substantiating the link between school boards' manifestation of these characteristics and students' academic achievement is extremely limited. Yet, the idea that school boards may be critical, not only indirectly, for ensuring students' academic success has begun gaining momentum, evidence of which can be seen in the efforts of school board and educational governance organizations to focus school boards directly on students' academic achievement rather than budgeting, the superintendent, the community, or other more traditional foci. Researchers have just begun to present evidence of an association between school boards and students' academic achievement (Goodman & Zimmerman, 1997; IASB, 2000; McAdams, 2000). A solid, rigorous, multi-method body of research that clearly identifies key characteristics of effective school boards and clearly links these characteristics to students' academic achievement may be essential for school boards' survival. Furthermore, it may slow or reverse states' and others' increasing involvement in local education and enable boards to resume greater control over local educational governance.

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NOTES

1. The term "school boards" is used throughout the paper to refer to *local* school boards of *public* education in the United States; private and foreign school boards are not discussed, except where specifically noted.

2. A review of the literature on superintendents' effectiveness can be found in Thomas' (2001) companion technical report, *The Public School Superintendency in the 21st Century: The Quest to Define Effective Leadership*.

3. The term "expert" is used throughout the report to refer to individuals "having, involving, or displaying special skill or knowledge derived from training or experience," and the term authority "authority" is used to refer to "an individual cited or appealed to as an expert," as defined by Merriam Webster's (2001) [on-line]. Available: http://www.m-w.com

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